

# How to Reduce Stress Through Mindfulness

**P**racticing mindfulness can benefit your health and well-being. Learn how you can build mindfulness into your everyday life.

## What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a state of intentional, nonjudgmental focus on the present moment. Mindfulness techniques are often incorporated into other practices, such as yoga or meditation. It is often thought to include the following elements:

- **Awareness** – Being tuned in to what is happening in the present moment, including sights, sounds, smells, or physical sensations you might usually ignore.
- **Focus** – Paying attention to the present moment, without thinking about past or future events.
- **Acceptance** – Accepting whatever you might be feeling or thinking, without judging it or trying to change it or your reactions.
- **Observation** – Recognizing unpleasant sensations, thoughts, and feelings as temporary and fleeting, observing them objectively without reaction or judgment.

## What Are the Benefits of Mindfulness?

Mindfulness has been studied for many years. According to recent research, it has several benefits for physical and mental health. Some of the strongest health benefits include:

- **Improves mood** – Mindfulness training may reduce depression and anxiety. One study found that mindfulness training was as effective as antidepressant medications in preventing a depression relapse.
- **Reduces stress and its consequences** – Mindfulness can lead to less intense stress responses. This has many health benefits, such as lowering your blood pressure and strengthening your immune system.
- **Improves coping with pain** – People with chronic pain who practice mindfulness meditation report less severe pain and pain-related distress. They are also more active in spite of their pain.
- **Improves brain functions** – Practicing mindfulness helps build your ability to pay attention and focus. Over time, this training can sharpen memory and improve mental performance.
- **Helps with weight management** – Some mindfulness techniques have

been shown to reduce overeating and obesity.

The benefits of mindfulness training may persist for years, because learning to be mindful is something that can be applied to your daily routine.

## What Are Some Common Mindfulness Techniques?

Here are brief descriptions of a few common mindfulness exercises. You can try many of these anywhere, at home or on the go, in a few moments of quiet. To learn more about these techniques, take a look at the section on Resources.

- **Mindful breathing** – One of the simplest exercises is mindful breathing. Simply spend a few minutes focusing your awareness on the movement of your thoughts and your breath in and out, without trying to change them in any way.
- **Body scan** – While seated or lying down, gradually focus your attention on one body part at a time, noticing any physical sensations without judging or reacting to them. A typical body scan might start with the soles of the feet and then progressively move awareness to the knees, hips, back, belly, chest, neck, and head.
- **Mindful eating** – This exercise involves eating very slowly and deliberately while paying attention to the sensations of holding the item, smelling, tasting, chewing, and swallowing it.
- **Loving kindness meditation** – An exercise in which you direct positive thoughts and wishes first to yourself, then to your close family and friends, then to more distant acquaintances, and finally to all humanity.
- **Mindful movement** – While walking or rolling, pay close attention to your breathing, your body movements, and your surroundings. You can also practice mindfulness while doing familiar exercises, such as yoga, focusing on the physical sensations as you enter and hold each pose.

## What Are Some Ways to Practice Mindfulness?

- The Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program by Jon Kabat-Zinn is probably the most well studied mindfulness program. Audio-recorded guided meditations are available for purchase at: [www.mindfulnesscds.com](http://www.mindfulnesscds.com)
- A free online mindfulness course, taught by a certified MBSR instructor, is offered at: [www.palousemindfulness.com](http://www.palousemindfulness.com)
- You can find an in-person group course near you at: <http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/stress-reduction/find-an-mbsr-program/>
- Smartphone apps have mindfulness practices that may be helpful, such as Headspace, Simply Being or The Mindfulness App.

- Your local library, community center, or hospital may also offer in-person mindfulness classes or other resources.

## Additional Resources:

Jon Kabat-Zinn's books, including:

*Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming the Present Moment – and Your Life.*

*Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness.*

UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center:  
[marc.ucla.edu](http://marc.ucla.edu)

American Society on Aging: Be Here Now – And Age Mindfully:  
<http://www.asaging.org/blog/be-here-now-and-age-mindfully>

Mindfulness Northwest:  
<https://mindfulnessnorthwest.com>

Greater Good Mindfulness Information:  
[greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/mindfulness](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/mindfulness)

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