

# Mindfulness Exercises

## What is mindfulness?

It has been popularly defined as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145).

## How can mindfulness help?

Practicing mindfulness has been associated with:

- Reducing symptoms from anxiety, worry, depression, and pain
- Cognitive changes (for example, “better ways of thinking,” and “new thoughts and ideas”)
- Improved ability to focus on the present
- Learning to relax or calm oneself

Mindfulness-based interventions have been shown to have “positive effects in patients with anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, eating disorders, depression and personality disorders” (Grecucci, 2015, p. 3).

Mindfulness therapy “may be helpful across a range of conditions, leading to improvements in outcomes such as anxiety, depression, pain, stress, coping styles, sleep quality, and quality of life” (Baer, 2003; Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004, as cited in Brown, 2010, p. 225).

Mindfulness-based relapse prevention (MBRP) has been extensively studied in people with substance use disorders. “The mindfulness meditation component of MBRP affects numerous brain systems associated with decreased craving, negative affect, and relapse, and improved impulse control, and it may repair the neural changes associated with addiction and relapse” (Khusid & Vythilingam, 2016, p. 971).

## What do mindfulness exercises look like?

“Mindfulness classes, or meditation exercises train participants to focus awareness on a specific target, such as breathing or routine activities (e.g., eating or walking). Mindfulness meditation also develops the ability to shift awareness intentionally from one target to another; for example, individuals may shift awareness from a distressing thought or emotion to their breath or to sensations in the body. Through these practices, mindfulness meditation may assist individuals to more readily disengage from excessive reactivity and learn more effective ways of responding to distressing cognitive and emotional experiences” (Brown, 2010, p. 226).

An example of mindfulness practice is being mindful of one’s breathing. This technique can work well with people who are new to mindfulness. This might include paying attention to inhalation and exhalation. The person focuses their attention on their breathing and being present in the moment even when emotions or other thoughts come about.

## Mindfulness resources

Search Insite for Mindful Moments Activity for quick reference cards to practice:

- Awareness of breath
- The STOP method
- Breathing space