

Mindful Meditation Mantra



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Introduction

Ten million people in America practice mindful meditation. That's quite a lot. Mindful meditation has become popular as more and more people enjoy living a better, less stressful, more productive life.

Why are these people turning to meditation to improve their daily lives? The easy answer is, meditation works. The more complex answer is that today, we are suffering from information overload and stress more than previous generations. Some meditators want to reduce stress and enjoy greater peace. Others seek more awareness to create a more purposeful life. Still others want to gain greater awareness and align their thoughts with their actions. Mindful meditation is useful for all of these purposes. What is true for everyone, however, is that the more you know about your thinking, the more you are in control of your life.

Whatever the reason, mindful meditation can be a powerful force. Like music, life has many layers, and mindful meditation can help you become aware of all the nuances.

Mindful meditation isn't magic. It allows you to concentrate your awareness on the here and now. All too frequently, our attention can scatter into the past or the future. We become distracted and unable to focus on what is important in the present.

Mindful meditation gives us power to focus on the here and now. It increases our mental energy, allowing us to perform better and achieve more. Quite simply, mindful meditation makes us more efficient in many areas of our lives.

More importantly, it puts us in control. The mind is an extremely complex labyrinth, where the subconscious can rule and throw roadblocks in our path. There are times we behave in certain ways without being consciously aware of why. Mindful meditation increases our awareness and opens our minds to more answers. Our senses are heightened as we enjoy the present more fully. Everyday activities, from what we eat, how we enjoy art and listen to music, and how we respond to friends and family become more vivid as mental walls crumble.

Mindful meditation relaxes us. With awareness, stress and unpleasant thoughts become less threatening and easier to handle. We become more relaxed and are able to let more joy and peace into our lives.

Today, we live in a state of impermanence more than ever before in history. More than a hundred years ago, most people spent their lives in the town in which they were born. They knew all their neighbors. Their station in life determined their job. It may not sound ideal to us, but it certainly wasn't stressful. These days, we live very fragmented lives. We may move regularly and barely know our neighbors. We switch jobs and friends on a regular basis.

Constant change has become the one permanence on which we can rely. There's no denying that modern knowledge and conveniences have brought us untold advantages. However, at the same time, we have lost our connection to others and our surroundings. Mindful meditation brings back that important lost connection to what is happening inside of us and around us. It's not an antidote to the problems of living in the 21st century, but it can provide the skills to help us cope with many of its problems.



You don't have to be a yogi to reap the benefits of mindful meditation. The more you practice, the better you will become. It's like exercise for the mind. You know what daily exercise does for your body. It strengthens and firms those muscles.

In much the same way, daily mindful meditation strengthens your mind and hones your thinking process. It's both simple and complex, and at all times, it's a choice. Hopefully, this book will help you make the right one for you. Consistency is the key to successful practice. Even a short meditation period every day is more effective than sporadic longer meditations.

Like physical exercise, mindful meditation is a process. Success doesn't happen overnight. But it will happen. When you begin your meditation journey, you may find it difficult to sit quietly for 15 or 20 minutes at a time. You may start making excuses why it's okay to skip meditation for just one day.

This will make it harder to resume meditating the following day, and you'll easily find an excuse why you shouldn't. You're too tired, too busy, too frustrated ... any excuse will do. That's why making a commitment to regular meditation is necessary. Ask yourself what motivated you in the first place. Make a pact with yourself that you will get up half an hour earlier in the morning to meditate. With a firm commitment, you will gain momentum and see the results.

Mindful meditation is unrivalled in its ability to open your mind. If you are new at mindful meditation, it is helpful that you ask yourself what has motivated you to start meditating at this time. There is, however, no right or wrong reason.

Chapter 01 - Mindful Meditation – An Overview

Mindful meditation is actually very simple, yet it comes with great benefits.

The Origin Of Mindful Meditation

It's a Western practice with roots in thousands of years of Buddhism, where it's referred to as "Insight Meditation." As that name suggests, it is meant to develop our mental skills and become more aware. However, mindful meditation is not associated with any specific ideology.

Mindfulness is a skill we all possess, but not all of us develop and cultivate it fully. The unique thing about mindful meditation is that it allows us to take an active part in our thinking process instead of remaining passive. It's more than being aware of the world around us; it specifically refers to that exciting and sometimes mysterious world inside of us. Mindfulness increases our awareness of ourselves and how we think. It's an effective way of knowing ourselves better.

Mindful meditation is always purposeful and non-judgmental. We calmly accept and acknowledge what is. Instead of moving through the day on autopilot, mindful meditation allows us to be more present and gain more control over our thoughts and activities. This invariable enriches our lives beyond measure.

Mindfulness To Tackle Daily Challenges



When we practice mindful meditation consistently, we gain an inner calm that will help us deal with life's many challenges. How often have we become so stressed that we have consciously avoided thinking about our problems, which then only worsen as we become more stressed? Sometime, it may feel easier not to think at all. But in the long run, reality will take over.

Non-judgmental awareness allows us to remove ourselves mentally from the mental tsunami and remain calm in times of adversity. We become more connected to our experiences in a healthy, non-threatening way.

On a basic human level, it's natural for us to push aside unpleasant thoughts by distracting ourselves from what is really important. Addictions to alcohol, drugs and social media are just some of the ways we avoid dealing with the present.

This obviously is not helpful and merely generates greater anxiety and stress. Daily mindful meditation keeps us focused on the present and helps us deal with problems rather than avoiding them. Fortunately, becoming more

aware is a skill that can be learned. Like playing a musical instrument or a sport, the more we practice, the better we become at it.

The Positive Impact Of Mindful Meditation

Mindful meditation has moved from the mystical to mainstream. Many studies have confirmed the benefits of regular mindful meditation.

1. Less stress-related illnesses
2. Better sleeping habits
3. Lower blood pressure
4. Better immune system
5. More energy
6. Better pain management
7. Better decision-making ability
8. Greater resilience when faced with adversity

The reason mindful meditation has proven so powerful is that the body and mind are intricately connected. When our emotional state suffers, so does our body. This is especially relevant to stress, which can cause many physical problems. As a result, mindful meditation not only improves our mental health, but our physical health, as well.

In the past, doctors have concentrated on prescribing medication for anxiety and stress-related symptoms. However, following a myriad of studies in recent years, doctors are now recognizing the value of mindfulness and recommending mindful meditation as a treatment instead of prescribing pharmaceutical drugs.

A study at John Hopkins University showed that 20 percent of 3,500 patients using mindful meditation showed improvement in symptoms of depression as opposed to the placebo group. These numbers are the same for patients

using anti-depressants. That means meditation has the same effect on our brain as medication. Interestingly, these patients only meditated two and a half hours each week. That's how powerful mindful meditation can be. The study concluded that if patients were to spend even more time meditating, they would see even better results.

Neuroscience has revealed that people who meditate regularly show an increase in gray matter in brain regions that regulate emotions and learning. Similar studies have found that areas of the brain that process fear decrease in size. Science is providing a connection between meditating and brain waves, and studies are continuing.

Another study showed that three months of regular meditation affected enzyme activity that control how we age. This important finding could link meditation to a slowing of the aging process.

Chapter 02 - Practicing Mindful Meditation

With all of its benefits, practicing mindful meditation is extremely easy. Let's go through the steps.

The Essentials

Wear comfortable clothing. You don't want to have your focus interrupted by a tight pair of pants or skirt. Find a comfortable seat. Ideally, it will be in a peaceful spot without clutter and noise. You can meditate indoors or outdoors.

Start your meditation with short sessions of around 10 minutes. This will make it easy to develop the habit of meditating and working your way up to half an hour or even a full hour.

Mornings or evenings are the best times, but any time you spend meditating works. You can also split your meditation sessions and do half when you get up and the second half before going to bed.

Getting Started With Mindful Meditation

Either sit in the traditional lotus position or simply relax in a comfortable chair, with your feet resting on the floor. Keep your spine straight but not stiff. Let your head hang naturally with a downward gaze.

Your hands should be resting comfortably on your thighs. You can keep your eyes open, but most people seem to prefer closing them. Do whatever works best for you. The goal is to get completely comfortable and not to worry about

whether you are doing it right or wrong. Just do it, and you will enjoy the results.

Start focusing on your breathing. All your attention should be on how the air feels as you inhale deeply through your nose down to your stomach, then exhale. Notice the physical sensations of the air moving down your body, then being expelled through the nose. Become aware of the rise and fall in your chest as you inhale and exhale.

Don't worry if your attention wanders. This is perfectly normal. What is important is that you don't try to stop those intruding thoughts. Just let them flow through your mind non-judgmentally and return your focus to your breathing. If you find your thoughts wandering too often, don't worry. Simply observe whatever is happening. Don't judge or blame yourself. Just observe what your mind is doing.

When you're done meditating, sit quietly for a moment before opening your eyes. Take a minute and observe what you are feeling. Again, it's important not to judge yourself. When you are ready, go about your day.

The act of focusing on your breath helps you become aware of your thoughts and emotions. The more you meditate, the more aware you become. And as we'll discuss in the next chapter, meditation is all about increasing your awareness.



Meditation Helps You Overcome Stressful Situation

Daily mindful meditation will help you cope with stress, but even normal days can make it challenging to remain in focus and mindful. Your boss wants to see you in his office NOW. Your spouse has been argumentative all week. Your child, who has just received his or her driver's license yesterday, has disappeared with your car and five best friends. It's stressful, and it's called life. Mindfulness can help you cope with these adversities.

Before seeing the boss, arguing with your spouse, or writing your heir out of the will, take a deep breath. Literally. Even if it's at your desk, sit quietly and spend two minutes inhaling and exhaling. However, you can do this exercise anywhere, such as in an elevator or while waiting for a street light to change. There's remarkable power in breathing. Just a few minutes will help calm you for whatever you need to face. These short breathing moments can be your own mini mental health spa.

You will also find that taking a mindful walk can greatly elevate your mood. All it takes is 10 or 15 minutes. You can do this outdoors or in the hallway of your office.

Walking Meditation

A walking meditation helps focus your scattered thoughts. It's a chance to work through the mental tsunami that can invariably ruin your day. You can do it anywhere, while walking to the store, to work, or through a park. Take care while crossing the street. When we walk in a normal fashion, we do so automatically, without awareness. We simply move forward from Point A to Point B. Not so with a walking meditation.

During walking meditation, keep your hands wherever they are most comfortable – at your side or in front of you. You may find it useful to mentally count out 10 steps at a time as you walk.

Instead of focusing on the rising and falling of your breath, you will focus on your feet as they rise and fall with each step. Be aware of your body as it shifts its weight as you walk.

As in a sitting meditation, thoughts will intrude. You will notice sights and sounds as you move. That's fine. Be aware of the intruding thoughts and gently shift your attention back to your feet. Another form of walking meditation is to focus on your environment instead of your body. As you walk, become aware of the sounds and smells around you. Notice colors and shapes. Don't judge or react, simply remain aware. If your mind wanders, pull it back into focus.

Whether you do a regular half-hour meditation session at home or a mindful walking meditation on the way to the store, incorporating mindfulness into your day should become a natural part of your lifestyle. You deserve it.

Chapter 03 - Exclusive Mindful Meditation Techniques

In addition to the breathing meditation, there are additional techniques that will help you enhance your awareness and become more mindful. So much is going on around us at all times, yet most of the time, we move through the day on autopilot. These exercises are designed to strengthen your mind, in the same way push-ups are meant to strengthen your body. They are also fun and will make your day more enjoyable and alive.

Focus on a Specific Object Meditation

You'll be keeping your eyes open for this meditation. The exercise is enormously helpful in preventing your focus from wandering.

Start by choosing an object. It can be anything – a flower, a picture, an interesting design, a candle ... anything that touches your fancy. It should be the right size for you to observe it easily in its entirety. The purpose of the object is to be your focal point when your attention strays.



Start by closing your eyes and focusing on your breathing for 5 minutes to become relaxed.

When you feel ready, open your eyes and observe the chosen object.

Notice any lights and shadows falling on the object.

Notice the texture. Is it smooth, bumpy, silky? Imagine what it would feel to the touch.

Notice the different shades of color. Keep breathing slowly. Make no judgments about the object. You're simply an observer.

Continue as long as you wish. Ten minutes is a good time. If your mind wanders, let your awareness return to the object.

Since modern life can assault our senses on a daily basis, we can remain oblivious to the beauty around us. How often do we really notice our surroundings? This quiet exercise is helpful in keeping your focus sharp.

Body Scan Meditation

This mindful meditation is useful in releasing tension at the end of a day and in helping you fall asleep easily. Tension can frequently settle in specific areas of the body, such as shoulders, bringing on aches and fatigue. This will draw attention to trouble spots and help you relax.

Sit or lay anywhere you are comfortable. Close your eyes and breathe in and out for 5 minutes to enhance relaxation.

Shift your focus to your body.

As you breathe, become aware of various body parts. Start with the toes and feet. Move to the ankles and up the legs. As you notice any tension, breathe into it, then exhale.

Keep breathing as your awareness moves past your hips to your torso. Breathe into any tension that you may notice.

Keep breathing and notice your arms, hands and fingers. Continue to breathe into spots that feel tense.

As you continue to breathe, move your awareness to your shoulders, neck, face, and skull. Breathe slowly into any tension spots.

Spend as much time on any tense spot as is necessary. This is a wonderful exercise to relieve tension, calm your mind and hone the way we deal with stress.

Counting Mindful Meditation

As with the other meditations, sit comfortably and practice the basic breathing meditation for five minutes to relax.

Take a deep breath and inhale.

Wait a second and exhale while counting out the number 1 in your mind.

Take another deep breath and inhale.

Wait ... and count out the number 2.

Continue doing this until you have counted to number 10.

Repeat this counting process by starting with the number 9 and going backward to 1.

If at any time during this exercise you lose track of a number, start over from the beginning.

As you get better, you can increase the base number to 20, or even 30.

Find Your Happy Place Meditation

Sit comfortably and enjoy five minutes of mindful breathing meditation.

Now, imagine you are in a peaceful, beautiful place. It can be a place you've been to, or a place you imagine. Whichever, it is very relaxing and soothing. There's no place you'd rather be.

Look around and experience the sights, sounds and colors around you. Notice how your body feels. Allow yourself to become lost in the beauty of your special place. Take all the time you want.

Notice the sense of peace and calm flooding through your body. When you are ready to leave, take a deep breath and open your eyes. You are now ready to face the challenges of your day.

Chapter 04 - Mindful Meditation and the Brain

What Scientists are Learning?

Until recently, scientists regarded the brain as mass inside our head. Nothing more and nothing less. It was believed that as adults, we are stuck with the neurology cards we were handed at birth for life.

That theory has been proven to be false.

With the use of MRIs, neuroscientists have discovered that: a) we have far more control over our brain than previously thought; b) changes in the brain can be quantified, and c) we can change our thinking to improve our lives.

The fact is, our brain keeps changing throughout our life. The remarkable truth about mindful meditation is that it allows us to control those changes. For centuries, we have enjoyed the truth of Rene Descartes words, “I think, therefore I am.” Modern science now allows us to amend that bit of wisdom to, “I think, therefore I control who I am.” The realization that we have the power to influence the workings of our brain has many far-reaching potentials.



We are seeing that a mere 30 minutes of mindful meditation each day can have a measurable effect on various areas of the brain. Let's take a look at what is being discovered.

A study conducted at UCLA shows that people who have practiced mindful meditation for 20 years or more had a greater amount of gray matter within the entire brain. The results of this study can have life-changing effects on aging diseases such as dementia and Alzheimer's and how we age in general.

A study at Yale University has found that mindful meditation decreases "brain chattering," or "monkey mind." Buddhists call it monkey brain because our brain can resemble the chattering, noising clamoring of monkeys, especially when driven by fear. The Yale study, and others, has shown that mindful meditation serves the function of a volume control, toning down the noise and allowing for some mental peace and quiet.

Studies at Johns Hopkins University have found mindful meditation has a similar effect as medication on the brain in its ability to ease depression and anxiety. While mindful meditation may appear to be just "sitting there," in reality, it has a powerful healing effect on the brain.

A Harvard study has shown that mindful meditation increases brain areas responsible for learning and emotions. At the same time, it decreases the brain area that deals with stress and fear. In the same study, it was shown that the perception of fear in the participants also changes. In other words, mindful meditation can control the amount and intensity of fear that we experience. A study at the University of Massachusetts confirms that mindful meditation reduced the level of anxiety in participants.

At the same time, as the level of fear decreases, the level of awareness increases, in effect, taking up the new, available space in the brain.

Studies about the effect of mindful meditation on the brain are ongoing. But the fact that we can “tone” our brain muscles in the same way we tone our thighs and abs is encouraging wider interest in the scientific community.

Chapter 05 - Why is Awareness So Important?

Greater self-awareness is at the root of mindful meditation. Prior to the 1970s, self-awareness was a somewhat vague concept. At the time, psychologists Shelley Duval and Robert Wicklund defined and advanced the link between behavior and thoughts. If we could understand our thoughts, we could increase the awareness as to why we behave in a certain way. This led to further studies and the conclusion that we can monitor thoughts and feelings as they happen.

Much of our inner life lies below the surface, in the vast region of the subconscious. Our lives are governed by patterns set long ago, sometimes at birth. Perhaps the first words out of your parent's mouth when you were born was, "Here my future doctor." Growing up, much was expected of you, and your career path was clear. Good schools, perfect grades, best college, then medical school. After an appropriate period, there would be a suitable spouse, a desirable house, followed by two adorable and well-behaved children.

If this is our internal blueprint, we might never question it. We may not even be totally aware that this has been our path from birth. It's as if we've moved on a kind of automatic pilot, with us just along for the ride. If, at age 30, we drift into a state of depression, we become utterly confused. We have achieved our dream. What could possibly be wrong?

Our mind can be conditioned in many ways. With the help of mindful meditation, we can recognize a pattern of behavior. It's this awareness that allows us to take that first proactive step toward change. We are now in the driver's seat.

There are countless ways when our conditioning simply bypasses our inner self. We are someone else's creation, not a person in our own right. Our thoughts and feelings are so deeply buried, we are no longer aware of them. Except, on some level, we are aware. But our only clue may be anger, sadness, or simply, a deadening numbness. We lose interest in things that used to excite us, we deliberately sabotage relationships, because then at least we have a logical reason for feeling miserably. Maybe we turn to drink and drugs.

Self-awareness isn't a magic pill. But when we practice mindful meditation and examine new thoughts and feelings, it serves as a roadmap to different choices and opportunities.

If you want a clue as to how awareness – or the lack of it – affects behavior, look around you. Do you have a friend who is in constant financial difficulties, but spends every weekend at the mall buying more shoes and makeup? Do you have a co-worker who constantly argues with and belittles people, yet wonders why he has no friends?

The link between thoughts and behavior couldn't be clearer. People sleepwalk through life and act on sheer impulse. They are unable to control their behavior because they are not in control of their mind and feelings. Their feelings are controlling them.



Awareness Promotes Positive Attitude & Perspective

There is another reason awareness is so important if we wish to move forward. Many of us ruminate about past wrongs. Some of us even obsess about them. Anger and bitterness can take over our mind and leave little room for anything else.

At the same time, studies show that our memories can be very different from the reality. Maybe we were bullied a few times in school. What we remember is not only the bullying, but the emotions that were a part of the experience – shame, anger, helplessness. When we recall the bullying, what we really remember are those negative feelings. This can significantly affect how we see ourselves and how we behave toward others. Maybe we are overwhelmed by shame and feel worthless, or we thrive on anger and start bullying others before they have a chance to bully us. These behaviors become ingrained habits, and we react automatically without understanding why.

Sadly, many people go through their lives chained to a script. The dialogue for these scripts can be written in childhood, and we spend our days reacting to established clues.

Growing up, were you called stupid, unattractive, or clumsy? It may be 20 or 30 years later; maybe the people who labeled you are no longer here. But, their voices still resound in your brain, whether you're consciously aware of them or not. Every time you tell yourself, "I can't do this." "Why bother?" "No one worthwhile will ever love me," your mind replays a script that determines your actions. The path you're walking now was set long ago. The band has stopped playing, but you're still dancing to the music.

As you become aware of your life's script, it may seem like a case of mistaken identity. Every fiber of your being is arguing, "But this isn't ME!" Whatever your pattern, it has moved you further and further from your true essence. This can be a painful realization. At the same time, it can be the key to the release from a lifetime of mental bondage.

The more you engage in mindful meditation, the more you will understand the reasons for your past actions and will be able to develop a new, alternative life script. It is never too late to change. As a matter of fact, mindfulness meditation makes it easier to open our mind and accept a different, perhaps unexplored path.

With mindful meditation, you become aware of the negative dialogue that guides your behavior. The opportunity to change the life script you've been living and open doors to better, more life-affirming choices is both exciting and challenging. But it is always worth it.

There is a possibility that some of the new awareness will make you uncomfortable. We're all human. We've all behaved badly or made mistakes we would rather not think about. And here comes mindful meditation, about to make us confront behavior we'd rather forget. It can seem scary, at first.

Eliminating Bad Habits With Mindful Meditation

To quote Dr. Phil, "You can't change what you don't acknowledge." The unwanted behavior will continue until you face it. Denial is a luxury you can't afford if you want to move forward. As a matter of fact, the problem will only worsen. Know that it is never too late to change. Sometimes, it does take some courage.

The point is so critical, it bears repeating. "You can't change what you don't acknowledge." Change isn't always easy, but may be necessary to become a better version of you.

There are other forms of meditation that urge us to brush away bad thoughts, as if they were unwelcome and unpleasant intruders. What they are, in effect, saying is that you are your thoughts. You have probably felt the effect of "bad" thoughts. "I'm a bad person." You identify yourself with your thoughts. That gives one particular thought an extraordinary power. The fault with that logic is that you are not your thoughts. Perhaps you are a person who has done a bad thing, but you are not a bad person. The difference is crucial when we attempt to change.

The "bad" thought isn't the real problem. Thoughts in themselves are neutral. When we strive for greater awareness, the issue becomes our inclination to resist accepting negative thoughts. That just makes them more powerful and prevents us from exploring them in a non-judgmental, mindful way.

When we start to label ourselves as bad or lazy, we accept that our entire essence can be defined with one word. When that happens, we act in ways to ensure that the label fits the deed. Labels become prophetic. We act badly and lazily.

Mindful meditation brings awareness to this destructive type of self-labeling. It lets us view our thoughts non-judgmentally, apart from ourselves and begin to challenge the truth of any label. Behavior is never set in stone. When you challenge your labels, your behavior will change accordingly.

Using mindfulness, the next time you think of yourself as a bad person, you can stop the thought as it happens. Tell yourself, “Here’s that silly label again. This is not who I am.”

Mindful meditation allows us to recognize the labels we have accepted. With non-judgmental awareness, we can act in ways that diminish the power of labels.

Chapter 06 - Role of Mindful Meditation at Work

Mindful meditation is proven to help reduce stress and deal more effectively with change. And the office is a place where you'll find an abundance of both. Work is where you spend most of your time. If you're stressed out at work, this will affect you psychologically, physically, and impact other areas of your life.

Work-related anxiety is known to cause headaches and insomnia. If it persists, it can cause high blood pressure, depression and weaken your immune system. To add to the problem, many people suffering from work-related stress resort to unhealthy means of coping, such as smoking, binge eating, alcohol, and even abuse of those closest to them.

Negativity Ruins Professional Life



The ability to control our responses to others is critical at the office. It's a bad idea to tell the boss off, and annoying your co-workers will only add more stress.

When we are aware and in control of our emotions, we are more able to suppress improper, aggressive responses and reactions. When we are in a problem-solving environment, such as work, it is crucial that our brain remains in an open, resilient mode instead of getting bogged down by negative thoughts and feelings.

Dealing with daily change and pressures is a necessary skill for high-level performance and consistent inner calm, and mindful meditation can make work a challenge instead of an emotional hazard zone.

Embracing Mindfulness For Better Performance

The good news is that many companies are starting to embrace mindfulness and are organizing on-site meditation programs. If your company doesn't have a program, you can still engage in mindful meditation. Short breathing meditations can be done at a desk and can quickly shift your mind to problem-solving stance instead of panic mode.

When work pressures become overwhelming, use mindful meditation to keep yourself in a calm zone. All kinds of ideas may be flowing through your mind. "My report isn't good enough." "The boss will fire me." Your mind is scattering into all kinds of areas except focusing on the report.

As you take control and change those intruding thoughts, it will be easier to approach the problem in a more productive way. Tell yourself two reasons why the situation won't be as bad as it appears.

Then, give yourself two ways of dealing with a worse-case scenario. If the boss really does hate the report, what actions can you take to resolve the problem? Instead of merely reacting, you are proactively seeking solutions.

A quick mindful meditation at your desk, or away from your desk, when necessary, will have immediate soothing consequences. If possible, practice the Happy Place meditation described in this book, as it is excellent preparation for facing adversity. Instead of remaining overwhelmed by what the boss may do, you will be prepared to listen mindfully to what is being said and form a more reasoned response.

How To Practice Mindfulness At Work

Many of us don't listen carefully when we are upset. We are too busy preparing our reply. To really listen and hear what is being said, look into the speaker's eyes. Keep your mind focused on what is being said instead of thinking about how you will answer. It's all too common to talk without thinking and say things that we wish we could take back.

Mindful listening improves how we communicate with others. You hear the words, and the intent behind the words. When people notice that you are genuinely paying attention, they are far more likely to listen to what you have to say.

More mindful actions you can take at work:

1. Before leaving for work in the morning, tell yourself that you will remain calm and mindful. This will set the tone for the day before you leave the house.
2. Become aware of how your thoughts add to your stress. Expecting things to go wrong will also set the tone for the day, although in a very negative way.

3. Have lunch with a friend or eat alone instead of lunching with co-workers. Getting away from the office, whether physically or mentally, can relieve work-related anxiety.
4. Take regular mindful breathing breaks.

Chapter 07 - Nurturing Relationships with Mindful Meditation

Relationships are confusing and can bring out the worse behavior in anyone. Whether it's your family, a date, friend or co-workers, even good relationships present constant challenges.

One of the reason relationships turn problematic is that many of us remain unaware of the other person's needs. We tend to be more focused on what we want. We have discussed the importance of self-awareness. However, when there are other people in our lives, we need to extend awareness to them, as well. If we don't, we will find ourselves engaging in a constant struggle for power.

The standard advice for relationship problems is to "work on the relationship," usually with a counselor. While this can certainly be beneficial, it is also crucial that we overcome our own insecurities and become more loving and understanding toward our partner. We need to work on ourselves.

How Mindful Meditation Nurtures Healthy Relationships?

When we are in conflict with another person, especially a loved one, we are more likely to be talking and expressing our grievances instead of listening. We've already discussed the importance of mindful listening. It's the basis of any important relationship.

When we just hear words, we quickly label and file them away without being aware what is really being said. We're too busy framing a reply to really "get" it. This leaves the other person frustrated and unheard.

Imagine your spouse telling you, “You forgot to pick up the dry cleaning like you promised.” What you hear is, “You’re too stupid to be trusted with a simple task.” Instead of mindfully listening to what is being said, you react to the unspoken words. “All you do is nag!” We are wired for a “fight or flight” response. For cavemen, it was a matter of survival. For us, thankfully, there are other options.



To quote Tibetan lama Jamyang Khyentse, “We think that we have successful communication with others. In fact, we only have successful miscommunication without being aware of it.”

Instead of blindly responding, take a deep breath. Think about what you’re going to say instead of reacting with the first thought that enters your mind. Consider how your words will affect the other person. Make a conscious choice to use a normal tone of voice instead of attacking.

When you engage in a more mindful conversation, you eliminate many misunderstandings that can damage a relationship. Mindfulness is always non-judgmental.

Most of us yearn to improve our relationships. Mindful meditation helps us clear our mind so that we are able to listen without judging and embrace kindness to avoid confrontations.

The next time you are tempted to engage in a confrontation with someone, simply stop. Become aware of any tension developing in your body. Is your breathing becoming shallow? Is your heart pounding? Are your muscles tensing? Simply notice without the need to judge or condemn.

Now, breathe into the tension. Focus on your right hand as you make a fist. Imagine the tension flowing into your hand. Now, open your first and release the tension.

Do this regardless of what the other person is saying or doing. Forget about proving that you're "right." Simply focus on your body. It only takes seconds, but in those moments, you have shifted your awareness to your anxiety and have chosen not to react but to remain in focused control instead.

Becoming more mindful can have a tremendously positive effect on your relationships.

Chapter 08 - Mindful Meditation and Happiness

We all want to be happy. It's our natural condition. It used to be believed that our capacity for happiness is innate. We're born with a certain happiness threshold, and that was the baseline. There is evidence that circumstances may raise or lower that baseline, but that it will eventually return to the original level.

For example, when someone experiences something exciting, such as receiving a much-wanted gift or a dream vacation, the happiness meter rises immensely for a while, then naturally levels off. These bursts of occasion positivity really don't affect the overall quality of our life. In the case of severe grief, our natural happiness level may plummet, but, eventually, it will return to the normal level. Neither extreme joy or extreme grief has a permanent effect on our happiness.

Does that mean that we cannot enhance our happiness state?



Gratitude Equals Happiness

Before we discuss meditation, it is important to point out that our basic level of happiness consists not of some single circumstance. Instead, it's the small, daily joys that elevate our mood ... a beautiful sunset, lunch with a friend, a good book all have the power to raise our spirits. We need to become aware of these mood elevators and consciously pursue them. It's important to savor those moments and give gratitude for the experience. Happy people make a deliberate decision to pursue these moments.

When it comes to moods, researchers have long focused on the negatives, such as depression and anxiety. It's as if happiness isn't worth studying. But that is changing.

Mindful Meditation Proven To Cultivate Happiness

Dr. Richard Davidson of the University of Wisconsin, has spent considerable time studying Tibetan monks. More recently, he followed employees taking part in an eight-week mindful meditation program. The results of Dr.

Davidson's findings show that, in all cases, a program of mindful meditation can elevate a person's mood.

You needn't be a monk to reap the benefits. Following the meditation program, participants reported enhanced positive moods and decreased negative feeling. New research has found for about 50 percent of our baseline mood level is derived from genetics. Ten percent of our mood depends on circumstances, good or bad. That leaves 40 percent of our mood in our control. Happiness is something we can consciously cultivate and grow. This is very exciting news, indeed.

Mindful meditation has proven to be a solid foundation on which to build positive emotions, along with savoring all of life's small pleasures.

Shame and anger can be a tremendous barrier to happiness.

How To Meditate For Happiness

To let go of those negative feelings, do the following forgiveness meditation:

Sit comfortably, close your eyes, and practice mindful breathing for 5 minutes.

Allow thoughts, words or images of someone you can't forgive yourself to surface in your mind. It can be someone you've hurt, and you have regretted your actions ever since.

Let your mind wander to how much you cared for this person, and the pain that you caused. If you are remorseful, feel those emotions. Accept what happened in the past. It is done. It is time to forgive yourself.

In your mind, think, “I forgive myself. I have made mistakes and caused pain, either deliberately or not. I am not the same person. I have learned much from life. It is time for me to move on. I forgive myself. I am ready to let joy back into my heart.”

Feel free to use words appropriate to your situation. This exercise will lift the burden from your heart and allow feeling of happiness in its place.

If you feel bitter toward another person who has caused you pain, do the same exercise, but change the word “I” to “You.”

Chapter 09 - Successful People Who Meditate

Many successful people are crediting meditation as part of their regime to grow values, character and improve their overall health. For them, it's become a winning lifestyle that provides the tools for a higher-quality life.

Padmasree Warrior, CTO of Cisco Systems

Warrior meditates regularly. She has stated that meditation helps her manage her large corporation and considers it “a reboot for your brain and soul.”

Rupert Murdoch, Chairman of News Corp

Murdoch has admitted he is new to meditation but has expressed an interest in discovering its possibilities.

Tony Schwartz, CEO of The Energy Project

Schwartz is a long-time meditator. He credits successfully dealing with migraine headaches to meditation. He always believes it has improved his on-the-job performance. “Energy requires refueling intermittently.”

Bill Ford, Executive Chairman, Ford Motor Company

Ford has stated he uses meditation to develop greater compassion.

Oprah Winfrey, CEO, Harpo Productions, Inc.

Oprah practices meditation twice daily for 20 minutes. She has also encouraged meditation among her employees. States Oprah, “I walked away feeling fuller than when I'd come in. Full of hope, a sense of contentment,

and deep joy. Knowing for sure that even in the daily craziness that bombards us from every direction, there is — still — the constancy of stillness. Only from that space can you create your best work and your best life.”

Larry Brilliant, CEO, Skoll Global Threats Fund

Brilliant learned to meditate in the Himalayas and emphasizes its ability to calm the mind.

Ray Dalio, Founder of Bridgewater Associates USA

Dalio has stated that, “Meditation has given me centeredness and creativity. It’s also given me peace and health.”

Russell Simmons, Founder of GlobalGrind.com

Simmons has been a long-time proponent of meditation. “You don’t have to believe in meditation for it to work. You just have to take the time to do it. The old truth is still true today, ‘God helps those who help themselves.’ My advice? Meditate.”

Robert Stiller, CEO, Green Mountain Coffee Roasters Inc. Stiller has a meditation room in his office and is a dedicated practitioner. “Meditation helps develop your abilities to focus better and to accomplish your tasks.”

Arianna Huffington, Editor-in-Chief, Huffington Post Media Group

Huffington practices meditation in the morning. Her company offers weekly meditation classes for its employees. “Stress-reduction and mindfulness don’t just make us happier and healthier, they’re a proven competitive advantage for any business that wants one.”

Mindful meditation is being seen by more and more people as a crucial tool to enhance performance and create a more fulfilling life.

Chapter 10 - Great Mindful Meditation Apps

It's somewhat ironic that while modern technology can cause a lot of stress, there are downloadable mindful meditation apps that can help guide you through some soothing mindful meditations. You can choose from a variety of specific topics, such as sleep, anxiety, depression, stress, etc. or participate in an entire mindful meditation program.

Make them a part of your daily routine. These apps can be downloaded to your Android device from the App Store for free. Some more complex programs offer a paid subscription. It's certainly a worthwhile investment.



There are hundreds of meditation apps, so let's look at some of the most popular ones.

Headspace

Headspace has over eight million users and counting, including entrepreneurs such as Richard Branson. The app teaches correct breathing techniques and guides the listener through various visualization exercises and walking meditations. It is considered the best meditation app for beginners.

Headspace offers a more intensive ten-day meditation program for a monthly subscription of \$10.00.

Mindfulness Daily

Meditation Daily offers daily 15-minutes guided meditations and lessons on how to integrate mindfulness into your daily life.

Smiling App

This mindful meditation app is free. It is divided into age-specific categories, for younger children, teenagers, and adults. There are also meditations specifically for sports and the workplace. Each meditation has a number of daily sessions to integrate and expand on a particular topic.

Insight Timer

Insight Timers offers 4000 guided meditations that can be listened to in any random order. The app attempts to create a community feeling by announcing how many other people are currently meditating.

Aura

Aura works on a slightly different premise than some of the other apps. It sends you a new meditation every day, so you don't have to listen to the same one twice. The app is personalized for you, according to age and specific mindful meditation interest on a certain day. Different meditations for different moods. The app allows you to save the meditation to listen to again.

To personalize the experience, Aura initially asks about your age and how stressed, optimistic, and interested in mindfulness you are. You inform the app of your mood on a specific day, and it will send you a complementary meditation to match. You can save any daily meditation for repeated listening.

Omvana

Omvana offers beginners, intermediary and advanced 20-minute meditations. There are 75 free meditations from which to choose, but there is no guidance as to which one might be best for you in a particular situation.

Stop, Breathe & Think

Stop, Breathe & Think is unique in that it actually explains the process of meditation, how it works and can benefit the meditator before the meditator starts to make use of the 30 free meditations. The 10-minute meditations revolve around breathing, kindness, staying calm and nature sounds. The app tracks how often you meditate.

Calm

The Calm app has a number of soothing nature sounds, breathing exercises, relaxation meditations and sleep-inducing "bedtime" stories to lure the listener to sleep. There are 16 meditations in all, each lasting from 3 minutes to half an hour.

The Mindful App

The Mindful App has options for everyone. It is a subscription app that can be downloaded with free features.

5 guided meditations, relaxing nature sounds, and daily reminders are free. The subscription also includes 20 meditation courses and 200 meditations specifically for relationships, calmness, body and focus.

Why not let a calming meditation app become a part of your daily routine?

Chapter 11 - The Benefits of Mindful Meditation

As you learn to understand yourself, you will develop a better understanding of why you act in certain ways. Some habits may be helpful, but other automatic behavior may be holding you back. That's what makes mindful meditation so effective. Greater awareness leads to opening doors in many areas of your life.



Recent studies on mindfulness have shown that the benefits of regular mindful meditation go far from what was originally believed. The mind and body do work together as a team. The practice has shifted from guru-led-hippies-chanting to scientific studies at institutions such as John Hopkins University and physicians recommending the practice to their patients. And the results have been phenomenal.

Let's take a look at some of the proven benefits of mindful meditation.

1. Mindful Meditation Can Reduce Pain

Many of us suffer from chronic pain. While mindful meditation is not a cure-all, studies have shown it can greatly alleviate the suffering. In clinical trials, mindful meditation has shown that mindful meditators experience over 50 percent less chronic pain, while long-term meditators have reduced their chronic pain by 90 percent.

How is that possible? Pain can come in two forms: physical and mental. When the brain reacts negatively to pain, the pain becomes amplified. By controlling how we react to the pain, we can greatly reduce its intensity. Mindful meditation includes actually focusing on the areas of the body that feel pain, observe, and release the struggle both physically and mentally.

2. Mindful Meditation Can Improve Sexual Experience

Many people find it difficult to discuss sexual dysfunction, even though it can be a pervasive problem. From low libido, poor self-esteem and body image to feelings of anxiety and depression, the brain can wreak havoc with sexual enjoyment. Non-judgmental mindfulness enables partners to communicate more effectively about sexual needs and concerns.

3. Mindful Meditation Can Improve Mood

We all have "moods." The happiest person can feel down for a while, and the bluest person can feel up on occasions. But many people's moods get bogged down with chronic depression and anxiety until there is little else. Research

has shown that people with severe mood disorders actually show changes in certain areas of the brain.

People suffering from depression and anxiety frequently live in the past or the future. Their mind can ruminate on hurts and injustices that happened years ago, with mental narratives obsessing around “should haves.” Or else, they can worry about things that have not yet happened, and aren’t likely to happen. Mindful meditation is the perfect tool to bring troubled thoughts back to the present.

4. Mindful Meditation Enhances Empathy

Stress, anxiety and depression can keep the brain stuck in negativity and self-absorption, thus reducing opportunities for compassion and empathy toward others. Through mindful meditation, the brain can be retrained to enhance these positive emotions.

5. Mindful Meditation Can Enhance Focus

We live in a world of distractions. People proudly boast of multitasking, although multitasking decreases efficiency rather than increasing productivity. When we check email while on the phone and at the same time read an important report, neither task has our full attention.

Our brain, too, can “multitask.” When we need our attention on a project, it can intrude with worries about unpaid bills, an unhappy relationship and an updating event for the weekend. And while our mind is attempting to deal with this mental tsunami, we remember an overdue library book and phone messages we failed to return.

For many people, this out-of-focus state of mind is a normal occurrence. When the brain is overwhelmed with a flood of unrelated thoughts and keeps jumping from one thought to the next, it cannot concentrate on the task at hand.

Regular mindful meditation lets us in control our wandering mind. We learn to recognize interruptions and set them aside for a more appropriate time. Mindful meditation allows us to get more done because it keeps our mind focused on the present.

6. Mindful Meditation Reduces Stress

We have already discussed that mindful meditation will relieve stress. It's such a critical, it bears a closer look. We experience thoughts and emotions every moment of our waking life. It's important to understand that emotions are neither good nor bad. They simply are. When negative emotions occur, we can either react, or we can acknowledge and move forward.

The problem is not the emotions themselves, but how we respond to them. These negative emotions are frequently caused by something that happened long in the past or hasn't happened at all. By increasing our awareness, mindful meditation keeps us from dwelling on these negatives that are utterly irrelevant to the present.

When our brain becomes jumbled with emotions, mindfulness helps us clarify what is important and what is not. As we let go of mental stressors, our body automatically functions on a higher level, enhancing health and alleviating life-threatening diseases. Statistics from the Center for Disease Control reveal that 110 million deaths each year are the result of stress-related illnesses.

That is a staggering number. Mindful meditation can greatly increase your chances of not becoming a statistic.

7. Mindful Meditation And Resilience

Bad things can happen to good people. To quote Nelson Mandela, “Do not judge me by my success, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again.”

That is the essence of resilience – not our failures, but how we deal with them. Resilience lets us deal with the ups and downs of life. Change and challenges are seen as just another opportunity for growth.

Resilience is the ability to get back up after adversity. Due to the unpredictability of life, there will always be joys and sorrows. Resilient people are able to greet change and difficulty as an opportunity for self-reflection, learning, and growing.

How we react to life’s stressors is a choice. We can turn fearful, bitter and blame the world for being unfair. Or, we can use mindfulness to change our thinking. We can’t control the world, but we certain can control how we react to it.

A study published in the Journal of Personality and Individual Differences showed that mindfulness helps people cope with hard times – and there will always be some hard times. Instead of reacting, mindful meditation allows us to hit a mental “pause” button and simply accept.

“Bad” feelings or thoughts aren’t the enemy. The problem is our reaction to those thoughts. When we use mindful meditation to become aware of these thoughts, we have the power to accept and move forward.

8. Mindful Meditation Boosts Creativity

By creativity, we're not just talking about art and music. Every day, we face situations and questions where some creativity could move us to the head of the line. "How do I get the boss to notice my report?" "How do I approach this popular person and ask for a date?" "How do I dress for success on my limited budget?"

The reptilian part of our brain approaches these situations with severe caution. Its sole purpose is to ensure our survival, so anything new and different is automatically seen as dangerous. This part of our brain immediately calls for safety. Don't make waves. Don't rock the boat. Don't do anything crazy.

Anything new and creative has a hard time getting past this reptilian brain. But mindful meditation can calm the reptilian brain and make it less reactive. This allows new, creative ideas to flourish. Some of the world's most creative companies, such as Walt Disney, General Mills, and Google, encourage innovation and creativity in their employees by making meditation rooms available to their employees.

Studies have shown that people who practice mindful meditation are less rigid in their approach to new ideas and problem-solving methods. The next time you're stuck while preparing a report, let mindful meditation help you stand out from the crowd that plays it safe and get noticed.

Chapter 12 - Create a Mindful Life

Mindful meditation can change your life. You learn that the thoughts flowing through your mind are not reality. What you do about those thoughts is reality.

In addition to meditation, you can use mindful strategies to enjoy mindfulness throughout the day. Mindfulness doesn't stop at meditation. It's a lifestyle. It puts mindful meditation into daily action.



Strategies To Practice Mindful Meditation In Everything You Do

Here are a few easy strategies you use can use to inject more mindfulness in everything you do.

1. Use short one-minute breathing meditations throughout your day. It's a great way to stay in focus.
2. When speaking to another person, really listen to what he or she is saying instead of preparing your response.
3. Chores like doing the laundry can be mindless. Instead of being bored, focus all your attention on the task. Remember how much fun doing simple things was when you were a child?

That's because you were totally engaged instead of trying to get it over with. When doing the wash, for example, turn your awareness to the texture and colors of the clothes. Notice that just-washed smell. Make folding laundry a game by paying attention to how your hands move. Be in the present.

4. Few of us eat mindfully. We can barely remember what we had for breakfast. Not only is gulping down food a waste, it can cause weight gain. Focus fully on what you are eating instead of watching television or answering your email. Eating is one of our greatest pleasures. Treat it as such. Prepare a colorful plate of healthy ingredients. Enjoy the aroma of freshly cooked food. Notice the texture as you eat. An orange will feel entirely different from an apple. Can you discern the different spices as they hit your palette? Make each meal a gastronomic and mindful adventure. Savor each bite.

Pay attention to the type of foods you eat. Sugars, simple carbs, prepared foods and unhealthy fats can cause fatigue and lead to serious diseases. You want both your mind AND your body to be at peak performance level. Eat lots of fresh produce, nuts, wheat products and lean meats and fish.

5. Slow down. What you're hurry, anyway? Many of us take pride in being busy, regarding it as a badge of productivity. We race through our day without awareness like robots, rushing around without knowing where we are or where we're going. Racing through life mindlessly does not add to our happiness. Quite the opposite. Without living in the present moment, we are far more likely to make careless mistakes.

When we physically slow down, we also slow down our brain. Take time for a mindful walking meditation. Sit in a park and watch squirrels chase each other. Stop for 15 minutes and listen to your favorite music. Take a break and reconnect with yourself.

6. Like rushing through life, multitasking renders us mindless to the present. We're not focusing on one task but are scrambling mindlessly to do several tasks at once. We're not accomplishing more, we just paying less attention and making more mistakes.

It's not only healthier but far more efficient to focus on one task at a time. Life is not a race; it's a journey to be savored.

Mindfulness helps you stay in the moment as you perform one task, then the next. It's also much less stressful.

7. Develop the habit of "checking in" with your mind. Mindfully observe your thoughts and emotions on a regular basis.

Become aware of how you feel when called to the boss' office or pulling into your driveway at the end of the day. The more you do this, the more you will recognize "script patterns" as they pop up. This will help you control the torrent of negative self-talk instead of becoming overwhelmed. Any time you increase awareness, you are practicing mindfulness. Keep in mind, mindfulness isn't about always feeling positive. It means always being aware of what you are feeling.

8. Closely related to slowing down, and equally as important, is doing nothing. Almost every day, someone asks us, “How’s it going?” We automatically reply, “Oh, busy, busy,” as if it were a badge of honor. This dialogue, which seems to happen constantly, is as mindless as multitasking. Our energy level flows and ebbs, and downtime becomes a physical necessity to boost up our optimal performance. Instead of feeling guilty for spending an afternoon relaxing at the beach or enjoying a movie, schedule it into your mindful lifestyle on a regular basis. The benefit of regular downtime is that we can sit back and simply enjoy the present while using all our senses. Smell the flowers, hear the birds, watch a puppy frolic and enjoy all that life has to offer more and in greater detail.

Conclusion

Mindful meditation and other mindful practices can dramatically improve how you live each day. All you need to do is get started.

Imagine getting to know the real you and reaching your full potential. Imagine enjoying each day to the fullest. It's not magic. It's about reclaiming our authentic self. There is much in life over which we have no control. Mindful meditation gives us control over ourselves, how we think and how we behave. Our actions are no longer random and self-destructive.

Begin slowly by meditating for just a few minutes each day, then gradually increasing the time. You may not notice the changes immediately, but they will happen. All you need to do is get started on this powerful journey.