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## Mindfulness: What's All the Hype?

Mindfulness seems to be the solution for everything these days. Need better sleep? Trying to lose weight? Stressed at work? Want to be a better parent? Mindfulness is the answer, or so many sources say. But, what actually is mindfulness, and what can it do for you?

Simply defined, mindfulness is a state of awareness in the present moment. You aren't thinking about the past or worrying about what's to come. It is acknowledging what is happening around you and accepting your feelings about it, without judgment.



Mindfulness can create a sense of calm by helping you to release control and focus your attention on only one thing and by allowing you to just be who you are, where you are. Everyone is mindful at times; it is an ability we all possess. The goal is to increase times of mindfulness so you can experience feelings of peace.

### Getting Started

Once you make a goal to practice being more mindful, there are different ways to approach it. Start small, and know that even fleeting periods of self awareness and of your surroundings are considered being mindful. You can choose times when you are eating, taking a walk, or sitting quietly. Mindfulness is a skill; anyone can learn and improve upon skills. The more you practice, the better you will become at being mindful in your daily life. Meditation, mindful exercise, yoga, tai chi, and grounding techniques are some of the many ways to practice being mindful.

Meditation is a great tool to use to become more mindful. One type of meditation involves relaxation techniques. Breathing deeply, doing a body scan, or listening to a guided visualization are all effective ways to meditate.

### Four Tips to Begin Practicing Mindfulness

- **Set aside** some time daily.
- **Start small** with as little as two minutes.
- **Choose** a guided meditation. (YouTube.com can be a great resource for finding guided meditations. Search for "deep breathing exercises," or "progressive muscle relaxation.")
- **Don't judge** yourself or your meditation.

Pat yourself on the back for any time you dedicate to being more mindful! Recognize the benefits you begin to notice, such as feeling more calm, focused and patient.

Notice increased feelings of gratitude for the little things in life. You can use awareness to help you think before you speak, increasing your empathy and patience. You also can use mindfulness to better organize and prioritize your schedule. And, you even can practice mindful eating as a way to make better choices in nutrition as explained in the following article.

# Mindful Eating: Creating a Healthier Relationship with Food

Most of us have experienced working through lunch, and the next thing we know, our food is gone, but we barely remember eating it. In this fast-paced world, we tend to multi-task in an attempt to save time. When most of us sit down to eat a meal or have a snack, we also are checking email, scrolling on our phones, chatting with a friend, or watching television. This often can lead to distraction from eating and from hunger cues, which then can cause overeating due to the fact that our brain hasn't had time to register that we just ate.



One way to combat this distraction is to practice mindfulness. According to the Center for Mindful Eating, mindful eating contributes to understanding your own physical hunger and satiety cues to help decide when to start and stop eating. On top of this, mindful eating also uses your senses to help choose foods that are both nourishing and satisfying.

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## Try these tips to be more mindful while enjoying food:

- Before eating a meal or a snack, check in with yourself in a non-judgmental way. Reflect on how you are feeling, think about your hunger level, and consider expressing gratitude for the food you are about to eat.
- Slow down while eating. If you're a fast eater, try putting down your utensil or taking a sip of water between bites.
- If working through lunch, try to bring your focus back to your food every so often, asking yourself if you still are enjoying it and how you are feeling.
- Try to avoid distraction while eating, especially when the activity or task doesn't slow down your pace of eating, like when doing hands-free activities like watching TV.
- If you must eat in front of a television, be sure to pre-portion your food and check in with yourself during commercial breaks.

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As the Center for Mindful Eating states, there is no right or wrong way to eat, simply varying degrees of awareness surrounding the experience of food. Make your experience positive by practicing mindful eating and creating a positive relationship with the food you eat.

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