

Mindfulness and Meditation

We've all heard about how important it is to be "mindful" but what exactly does that mean? And why is it so important?

Mindfulness is a way in which you can focus on the "now" to recognize what you are thinking, feeling, and sensing at that very moment without judgement or interpretation. It helps to slow down racing thoughts, let go of negativity, and calm both your mind and body. And this is important because decreasing the stress in your life can help you stay healthy, both physically and mentally.

Did you know that meditation brings so many benefits to your life? It can help decrease stress, anxiety, pain, and depression. It can even help you get a good night's sleep and lower high blood pressure by keeping you calm and relaxed

So how can someone practice mindfulness meditation? Well, there are many techniques, but in general, mindfulness meditation involves deep breathing and awareness of body and mind. To get started, all you need is a comfortable place to sit, three to 5 minutes of free time, and a judgment-free mindset.

Here are some examples:

- **Focus on your breathing.**
 - When you have negative thoughts, try to sit down, take a deep breath, and close your eyes. Focus on your breath as it moves in and out of your body. Sitting and breathing for even just a minute can help.
- **Pay attention.**
 - Try to take the time to experience your environment with all of your senses – touch, sound, sight, smell, and taste. For example, when you eat a favorite food, take the time to smell, taste and truly enjoy it.
- **Live in the moment.**
 - Try to intentionally bring an open, accepting and discerning attention to everything you do. Find joy in simple pleasures.
- **Accept yourself.**
 - Treat yourself the way you would treat a good friend.

Simple mindfulness exercises can be practiced anywhere and for any amount of time. But for more structured mindfulness exercises, such as sitting meditation, you'll need to set aside time when you can be in a quiet place without distractions or interruptions. While some people meditate for longer sessions, even a few minutes every day can make a difference. Increase your sessions by 10 or 15 minutes until you are comfortable meditating for 30 minutes at a time.

How often should you practice mindfulness meditation? As often as you wish! Try to practice mindfulness every day for about six months. Over time, you might discover that mindfulness becomes effortless.

Think of it as a commitment to reconnecting and nurturing yourself!

