

Practising Mindfulness

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a practice that has its origins in Buddhist meditation and is a way of being completely present in the moment. It's about being fully aware wherever you are and whatever you are doing, whether it's brushing your teeth, washing the dishes or sweeping the floor. Engaging in a practice of mindfulness involves being deeply attentive and receptive to the present moment and experiencing it with real openness and curiosity. There is nowhere to go and nothing to do. Just simply savour the moment. All that is needed is to stay focused, present and deeply attuned to your experience, as it unfolds from moment to moment.

Mindfulness can be practised in a more formal way through meditation or simply incorporated in the activities of daily life through a form of heightened awareness. Central to the practice of mindfulness is adopting what is often referred to in Buddhism as beginner's mind. This is about being willing to see everything as if for the first time, rather than veiled by preconceptions based on your history. Practising mindfulness requires a deep acceptance of your experience exactly as it is, without striving to change it in any way. Paying attention to the breath supports the process of staying with what is and fully experiencing the now.

Benefits of Practising Mindfulness

A large body of research related to Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) based on the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn has indicated that practising mindfulness confers a variety of health benefits. These include:

- Less stress and anxiety
- A reduction in negative thinking
- Equanimity and a more balanced outlook
- Higher energy levels
- An enhanced sense of wellbeing

Developing a Daily Mindfulness Practice

Turn your attention to the present moment and notice what is happening right now. Thinking about what is happening rather than just experiencing it, takes you away from the direct experience which is the real thing. Notice when you get into thinking, and bring your awareness back to your sensory experience and to anything else that is coming out of the now. Learning to be receptive is a key part of being fully in the now. This calls for an attitude of letting go and surrendering to whatever is.

An attitude of receptive attention can be cultivated by looking at something or listening to a sound with your full and undivided attention. If thoughts arise about what you are seeing or hearing, just notice them and gently bring your attention back to really looking or listening and allow yourself to experience the impact this has upon you energetically.

Although meditation is often thought of as something that is practised in a sitting position or lying down, you can also engage in a mindfulness practice whilst standing or even as a walking meditation, which is really about being fully present with each step that you take. It's not about trying to get anywhere, not even to the next step, just simply bringing your attention to your feet, being fully aware as you lift each foot slowly and then experiencing the contact your foot makes as it comes down and touches the ground.

As with any form of practice it's very important to do it on a regular basis. In my work with clients I've found that people are much more likely to commit to a practice and sustain it over time, if it's something they resonate with. So, it helps initially to take some time to explore what kind of mindfulness practice is more likely to work for you. Then just do it.

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