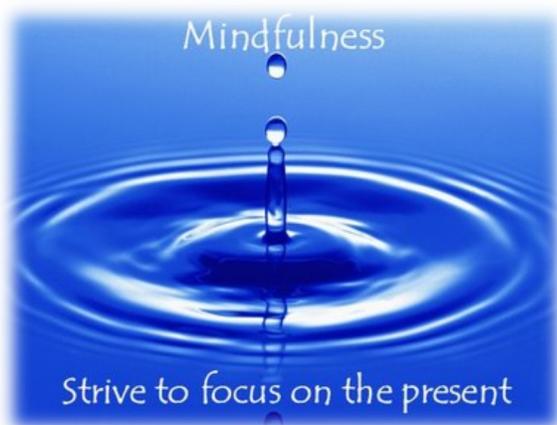


Mindfulness Matters

Can living in the moment improve your health?

At some point in your life, someone probably told you: "Enjoy every moment. Life is short." Maybe you've smiled and rolled your eyes at this well-intentioned relative or coworker—but the fact is, there's something to it. Trying to enjoy each moment may actually be good for your health.

The idea is called *mindfulness*. This ancient practice is about being completely aware of what's happening in the present—of all that's going on inside and all that's happening around you. It means not living your life on "autopilot." Instead, you experience life as it unfolds moment to moment, good and bad, and without judgment or preconceived notions.



"Many of us go through our lives without really being present in the moment," says Dr. Margaret Chesney of the University of California, San Francisco. She's studying how mindfulness affects health. "What is valuable about mindfulness is that it is accessible and can be helpful to so many people."

Studies suggest that mindfulness practices may help people manage stress, cope better with serious

illness, and reduce anxiety and depression. Many people who practice mindfulness report an increased ability to relax, a greater enthusiasm for life, and improved self-esteem.

One study found a link between mindfulness meditation and measurable changes in the brain regions involved in memory, learning, and emotion. Another researcher reported that mindfulness practices may reduce anxiety and hostility among urban youth and lead to reduced stress, fewer fights, and better relationships.

A major benefit of mindfulness is that it encourages you to pay attention to your thoughts, your actions, and your body. For example, studies have shown that mindfulness can help people achieve and maintain a healthy weight. "It is so common for people to watch TV and eat snack food out of the box without really attending to how much they are eating," says Chesney. "With mindful eating, you eat when you're hungry, focus on each bite, enjoy your food more, and stop when you're full."

Finding time for mindfulness in today's culture, however, can be a challenge. People tend to place great value on how much they can do at once and how fast. Still, being more mindful is within anyone's reach.

You can practice mindfulness throughout the day, even while answering emails, sitting in traffic or waiting in line. All you have to do is become more aware—of your breath, of your feet on the ground, of your fingers typing, of the people and voices around you.

Chesney notes that as people start to learn how to be more mindful, it's common and normal to realize how much your mind races and focuses on the past and future. You can just notice those thoughts and then return to the present moment. It is these little, regular steps that add up and start to create a more mindful, healthy life.

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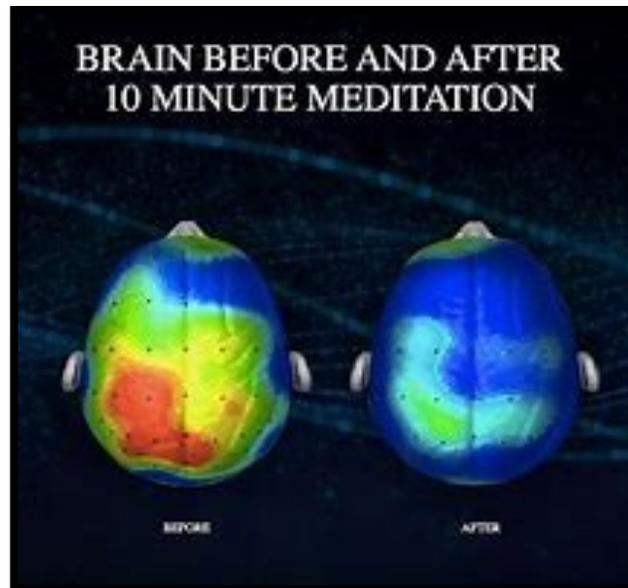
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Being Mindful

The concept of mindfulness is simple, but becoming a more mindful person requires commitment and practice. Take a moment and consider mindfulness.

Here are some tips to help you get started:

- **Take some deep breaths.** Breathe in through your nose to a count of 4, hold for 1 second, and then exhale through the mouth to a count of 5. Repeat often.
- **Enjoy a stroll.** As you walk, notice your breath and the sights and sounds around you. As thoughts and worries enter your mind, note them but then return to the present.
- **Practice mindful eating.** Be aware of taste, textures, and flavors in each bite, and listen to your body when you are hungry and full.
- **Find mindfulness resources in your local community,** including yoga and meditation classes, and mindfulness-based stress-reduction programs and books.



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