



## What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness can be defined as practice that helps us become more mentally, physically and emotionally aware of what is happening in the present moment; allowing us to enjoy the pleasant moments without holding on when they change (which they will); and being able to sit with and work through the unpleasant moments without fearing they will always be there (which they won't).

Mindfulness consists of both formal practice in the form of meditation (internal reflection and experience) and informal practice where we can utilise our 5 senses and ability to experience life in a way we may often take for granted. This can take the form of mindfully eating, walking, movement, listening, any every day task really just by choosing to give our full undivided attention to it.

We can compare the mind to a high speed overground train. When its moving so fast, the view out of the window can be so blurred that we eventually stop looking (we read the paper, go on our phones) and we miss the landscapes, the wildlife, the sunsets...the views that remind us just how amazing this planet is. Our perspective can become so limited that we aren't able to fully enjoy what's really going on around us. When we practice mindfulness and learn to slow down the mind enough to focus, become aware, fully present...we start to see all the things we've been missing, the things we often take for granted, the things there are to be grateful for and the things that inspire us. We begin to see the world with a fresh pair of eyes.

Mindfulness teaches us to quieten the frantic mind that is so preoccupied with thinking and doing and allows us to JUST BE in the moment. Because this moment is all that really exists, everything else is just memory and imagination. We tend to use the mind like a time machine, often sad remembering the past or worried imagining the future. We can get so caught up in random thoughts that they spiral out of control, often resulting in stress, low mood, or procrastination. Mindfulness teaches us to catch those thoughts as they are occurring, like watching petals floating down a river; to acknowledge them without labelling them as good or bad; and to detach from and observe them before letting them go., remembering that we are not our thoughts. And we can anchor ourselves to the present moment by focusing on our breath.

Of course this is easier said than done, as our minds sometimes have a mind of their own; thinking of things we don't want to think about, distracting us from what we actually want to focus on and creating emotions we often don't want to be experiencing. I like to compare this to a little monkey taking over the steering wheel of our minds - just doing its thing colliding with what it wants to while we go along for the ride. Half the time we're not even aware that it's happening!

Like with any skill mindfulness requires practice, especially with meditation if you have not been raised in a home or culture where this is common practice. Initial attempts can be challenging - it only takes a few seconds for the mind to drift and people often struggle with a sense of feeling bored or self-conscious. Some even fall asleep! The goal of mindful meditations isn't to have a blank mind; the skill is in catching the mind when it drifts and bringing our attention back to the present moment for a set period of time (anything from 1 minute to one hour a day, whatever feels right for the individual). This is the mental muscle meditation is building and the neural pathway that we can cement through practice – the ability to control our attention which shapes what we think, feel and do. We can then flex this muscle when we need to; when we are feeling overwhelmed, trying to solve a problem, looking for an answer or solution; when we want to focus on work or learning or tap into new and creative ideas; even when we are enjoying a moment so much we want to experience it for as long and as intensely as possible. These are some of the gifts that mindfulness and meditation have to offer.

# The Benefits of Mindfulness

35 years of clinical research provides evidence of the following benefits of mindfulness practice, which is recommended by the NHS UK as a viable treatment for anxiety and depression and is advocated by the National Institute of Excellence in Care (NICE):

Health Benefits	Performance Benefits	Relationship Benefits	Benefits for College Students	Benefits for Children
Reduce Stress and anxiety  Increase Happiness  Increase in sense of calmness  Improve Sleep  Reduce blood pressure  Increased immune functioning  Enhance ability to deal with illness  Increased pain management	Improve Learning  Improve Attention  Improve Focus  Boost Memory  Increased clarity in thinking and perception  Increase Cognitive Flexibility  Improve Self-Management  Improve Creativity	Improve Self-Awareness  Improve Self-Control  Reduce reactivity  Increase Compassion for self and others  Improve Social Awareness  Increase Relationship Satisfaction  Improved sense of connection	Decreased reactivity  Improved patience  Increase self-acceptance  Improved social skills  Improved stress Management  Mindful alcohol consumption  Reduced depressive symptoms  Improved self-control	Improve focus  Improve academic performance  Improve social skills  Improve emotional regulation  Improve empathy  Reduce stress, depression, and anxiety  Reduce aggression  Improved behaviour  Improved overall wellbeing

Facilitates recovery from illness			Improved emotional regulation	Buffers against bullying and victimization  Improve confidence, self-esteem, and resilience
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Workplace Benefits
<p>Improves executive functioning</p> <p>Improves job performance in the service industry</p> <p>Increase in number of hours worked</p> <p>Reduce work-related stress, anxiety, depression and fatigue</p> <p>Improve job satisfaction</p> <p>Increased resilience</p> <p>Improved social functioning and quality of life</p> <p>Reduce levels of burnout and turnover in the workplace</p>

For further information on the research and benefits of mindfulness see:

[https://positivepsychology.com/benefits-of-mindfulness/?fbclid=IwAR0A0jBEIzgmKP\\_Bzhgd3OJ5MCqrU-inpahoghmlXEkm3B7YadQx9d-1pfA](https://positivepsychology.com/benefits-of-mindfulness/?fbclid=IwAR0A0jBEIzgmKP_Bzhgd3OJ5MCqrU-inpahoghmlXEkm3B7YadQx9d-1pfA)