

MINDFULNESS EXERCISES

Mindful Breathing

This exercise can be done standing up or sitting down, and pretty much anywhere at any time. All you have to do is be still and focus on your breath for just one minute. Start by breathing in and out slowly. One cycle should last for approximately 6 seconds. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth, letting your breath flow effortlessly in and out of your body. Let go of your thoughts for a minute. Let go of things you have to do later today or pending projects that need your attention. Simply let yourself be still for one minute.

Purposefully watch your breath, focusing your senses on its pathway as it enters your body and then watch it work its way up and out of your mouth as its energy dissipates into the world. If you enjoyed one minute, why not try two or three?

Mindful Observation

This exercise is simple but incredibly powerful. It is designed to connect us with the beauty of the natural environment, something that is easily missed when we are rushing around in the car or hopping on and off trains on the way to work.

Choose a natural object from within your immediate environment and focus on watching it for a minute or two. This could be a flower or an insect, clouds, or the moon. Don't do anything except notice the thing you are looking at. Relax into a harmony for as long as your concentration allows. Look at it as if you are seeing it for the first time. Visually explore every aspect of its formation. Allow yourself to be consumed by its presence. Allow yourself to connect with its energy and its role and purpose in the natural world.

Mindful Awareness

This exercise is designed to cultivate a heightened awareness and appreciation of simple daily tasks and the results they achieve. Think of something that happens every day more than once; something you take for granted, like opening a door, for example. At the very moment you touch the doorknob to open the door, stop for a moment and be mindful of where you are, how you feel in that moment and where the door will lead you. Similarly, the moment you open your computer to start work, take a moment to appreciate the hands that enable this process and the brain that facilitates your understanding of how to use the computer.

These touch point cues don't have to be physical ones. For example: each time you think a negative thought you might choose to take a moment to stop, label the thought as unhelpful and release the negativity. Or, perhaps each time you smell food, you take a moment to stop and appreciate how lucky you are to have good food to eat and share with your family and friends.

Choose a touch point that resonates with you today. Instead of going through your daily motions on autopilot, take occasional moments to stop and cultivate purposeful awareness of what you are doing and the blessings it brings your life.

Mindful Listening

This exercise is designed to open your ears to sound in a non-judgmental way. So much of what we see and hear on a daily basis is influenced by our past experiences, but when we listen mindfully, we achieve a neutral, present awareness that lets us hear sound without preconception.

Select a piece of music you have never heard before. You may have something in your own collection you've never listened to, or turn the radio dial until something catches your ear. Close your eyes and put on headphones. Try not to get drawn into judging the music by genre, title, or artist name before hearing it. Instead, ignore any labels and neutrally allow yourself to get lost in the journey of sound for the duration of the song. Allow yourself to explore every aspect of the track. Even if the music isn't to your liking at first, let go of your dislike and just listen, become fully entwined with the composition without preconception or judgment of the genre, artist, lyrics or instrumentation.

Mindful Immersion

The intention of this exercise is to cultivate contentment in the moment and escape the persistent striving we find ourselves caught up in on a daily basis. Rather than anxiously wanting to finish an everyday routine task in order to get on with doing something else, take that regular routine and fully experience it like never before.

For example: if you are cleaning your house, pay attention to every detail of the activity. Rather than treat this as a regular chore, create an entirely new experience by noticing every aspect of your actions: Feel and become the motion when sweeping the floor, sense the muscles you use when scrubbing the dishes, develop a more efficient way of wiping the windows clean. Get creative and discover new experiences within a familiar routine task instead of laboring through and constantly thinking about finishing. Take the activity beyond a routine by aligning yourself with it physically, mentally and spiritually. Who knows, you might even enjoy the cleaning for once!

Mindful Appreciation

In this last exercise, all you have to do is notice 5 things in your day that usually go unappreciated. These things can be objects or people – it's up to you. Use a notepad to check off 5 by the end of the day. The point of this exercise is to simply give thanks and appreciate the seemingly insignificant things in life; the things that support our existence but rarely get a second thought amidst our desire for bigger and better things. For example: electricity powers your kettle, the postman delivers your mail, your clothes provide you warmth, your nose lets you smell the flowers in the park, your ears let you hear the birds in the tree by the bus stop, but...

Do you know how these things/processes came to exist, or how they really work; how they benefit your life and the lives of others; what life might be like without them? Have you ever stopped to notice their finer, more intricate details? Once you have identified your 5 things, make it your duty to find out everything you can about their creation and purpose to truly appreciate the way in which they support your life.

Source: <http://www.pocketmindfulness.com>