

Week 10: Mindfulness & cognitive behavioural therapy

Mindfulness is about being aware of you in the present moment in a non-judgemental way.

This also means being aware of your thoughts, body and environment, but not thinking about what any of these mean. It also involves emptying the mind of unhelpful clutter.

Is your mind full, or are you mindful?

([Watch this mindfulness video](#))



Mindfulness basics

1. **Set aside some time.** You don't need a meditation cushion or bench, or any sort of special equipment to access your mindfulness skills -but you do need to set aside some time and space.
2. **Observe the present moment as it is.** The aim of mindfulness is not quieting the mind, or attempting to achieve a state of eternal calm. The goal is simple: we're aiming to pay attention to the present moment, without judgement. Easier said than done, we know.
3. **Let your judgments roll by.** When we notice judgements arise during our practice, we can make a mental note of them, and let them pass.
4. **Return to observing the present moment as it is.** Our minds often get carried away in thought. That's why mindfulness is the practice of returning, again and again, to the present moment.
5. **Be kind to your wandering mind.** Don't judge yourself for whatever thoughts crop up, just practice recognizing when your mind has wandered off, and gently bring it back.

How to practice mindfulness

1. **Sit comfortably.** Find a spot that gives you a stable, solid, comfortable seat.
2. **Notice what your legs are doing.** If on a cushion, cross your legs comfortably in front of you. If on a chair, rest the bottoms of your feet on the floor.
3. **Straighten your upper body**—but don't stiffen. Your spine has natural curvature. Let it be there.
4. **Notice what your arms are doing.** Situate your upper arms parallel to your upper body. Rest the palms of your hands on your legs wherever it feels most natural.
5. **Soften your gaze.** Drop your chin a little and let your gaze fall gently downward. It's not necessary to close your eyes. You can simply let what appears before your eyes are there without focusing on it.
6. **Feel your breath.** Bring your attention to the physical sensation of breathing: the air moving through your nose or mouth, the rising and falling of your belly, or your chest.
7. **Notice when your mind wanders from your breath.** Inevitably, your attention will leave the breath and wander to other places. Don't worry. There's no need to block or eliminate thinking. When you notice your mind wandering gently return your attention to the breath.
8. **Be kind about your wandering mind.** You may find your mind wandering constantly—that's normal, too. Instead of wrestling with your thoughts, practice observing them without reacting. Just sit and pay attention. As hard as it is to maintain, that's all there is. Come back to your breath over and over again, without judgment or expectation.
9. **When you're ready, gently lift your gaze** (if your eyes are closed, open them). Take a moment and notice any sounds in the environment. Notice how your body feels right now. Notice your thoughts and emotions.

What are the benefits?

1. **Understand your pain:** Pain is a fact of life, but it doesn't have to rule you. Mindfulness can help you reshape your relationship with mental and physical pain.
2. **Enhances communication with family & friends:** Ever find yourself staring blankly at a friend, lover, child, and you've no idea what they're saying? Mindfulness helps you give them your full attention.
3. **Helps to reduce stress:** There's lots of evidence these days that excess stress causes pain and vice-versa. Mindfulness decreases stress.
4. **Focus your mind:** It can be frustrating to have our mind stray off what we're doing and be pulled in six directions. Meditation hones our innate ability to focus.
5. **Reduce brain chatter and worries:** The nattering, chattering voice in our head seems never to leave us alone. Mindfulness allows us to get some break from all the unnecessary thoughts and thereby reduces our worries.