

# 27 mindfulness

## for you to know

Mindfulness is the act of keeping your focus on the present moment. When you practice mindfulness on a regular basis, it can help to keep your anxiety at a lower level. Practicing mindfulness at the time you feel high anxiety can help you to manage it and bring yourself back to a peaceful state.

Being mindful means that you are paying attention to, and therefore living in, the present moment. Most of the time, our minds are reaching forward to the future, and we often start to worry about things that are unknown. That raises our anxiety level. Or our minds are reaching back into the past, and we may feel guilt or regret about something we have done or said. That raises our anxiety level, too.

Being mindful means being accepting and nonjudgmental about whatever is happening in the present moment. It is often our nature to be critical of ourselves, others, and our environment. This kind of judging rarely changes anyone or anything, but it does raise our anxiety level.

Focusing on the present moment can help you let go of anxiety. For example, if you are playing basketball, just focus on playing basketball. Watch your hands and the ball soaring through the air and feel the sweat on your forehead. You can't worry about your final exams or your recital or your job if you are just thinking about the ball. You can't stew about whether you should have said something else in a conversation yesterday if you are just paying attention to dribbling down the court.

Practicing mindfulness can decrease your anxiety as well as enrich your life experiences because you are more fully present in everything that you do.

## directions

Try each of the following exercises at least once.

### **Exercise 1**

Choose a simple activity that you can do in the next few hours to practice mindfulness. It could be anything from eating a bag of chips to getting dressed to lying on your bed listening to music. Make a conscious effort to perform this activity with mindfulness.

As you perform the actions, try to keep your attention focused only on what you are doing right at that moment. Use all your five senses to experience the activity. Pay close attention to exactly what you are seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, and tasting as you do this.

### **Exercise 2**

Since we are not used to focusing on the present, it can be hard to keep our minds from wandering. One way to help yourself stay focused is to talk to yourself silently as you perform each activity, simply reminding yourself of what you are doing at the time. For example, as you are eating chips, think to yourself, "Eating, I am eating." As you are getting dressed, think to yourself, "Dressing, I am dressing." It will probably seem a little strange at first, but it will help keep your mind focused on the present and off anxious thoughts.

### **Exercise 3**

As you go through the day, whenever you notice yourself feeling anxious because you have moved your thinking into the future or the past, simply remind yourself, "Come back to the present." Then move your mind away from wherever it has wandered to and bring it back to what you are doing right now.

## more to do

Which activity did you choose to practice mindfulness in exercise 1? \_\_\_\_\_

Describe what you noticed through each of your five senses as you did it.

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Describe what it was like for you to try exercise 2. \_\_\_\_\_

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What are the topics you usually think about when your mind moves into the future?

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What are the topics you usually think about when your mind moves into the past?

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Describe what it was like for you to try exercise 3. \_\_\_\_\_

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Circle how many times you noticed your mind wandering during the day.

once            ten times            hundreds of times            thousands of times

Describe your anxiety level as you tried these exercises. \_\_\_\_\_

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If you are like most people, you will find mindfulness a challenge. Our minds are simply not used to focusing in this way, but with practice, it becomes easier. Tell what it feels like for you to pay attention only to the present moment. \_\_\_\_\_

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