

Mindfulness Meditation

Is one of the oldest Zen Buddhist meditations. In this mindfulness-based practice you become the observer of sounds, sensations, images, feelings, and thoughts. You simply observe what is going on in your body. This meditation helps to focus your attention, which cultivates an awareness that ultimately leads to becoming mindful of how you are choosing to interpret your experiences. From there, you develop the ability to make more conscious choices in your life.

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Instructions:

1. Wherever you're at be comfortable in your seat, close your eyes, and become aware of your environment.
2. Pay attention to your breathing. Inhale deeply and exhale all tension in your body. You will do that for a couple of breathsX2
3. Take note of what you're feeling in that moment.
4. Focus your awareness on sounds (2 minutes).
5. Next, focus your awareness on sensations in your body (2 minutes).
6. Then focus your awareness on images in your mind (2 minutes).
7. Then focus your awareness on feelings (2 minutes).
8. Finally, focus your awareness on your thoughts (2 minutes).

Now slowly open your eyes, take a couple moments to center yourself, and observe without judgement what went on. Was it easy? Difficult?

How to develop mindfulness?

Step 1: AWARENESS

The first step in developing mindfulness is simply to become more familiar with what's actually happening in each moment. For example, you can become aware of your breath; of your body as you sit, walk, stand, or lie down; and of your

sensations - pleasant or painful. You can notice your thoughts and emotions as discrete aspects of your experience instead of overidentifying with them. You can become more aware of other people and the world around you. You might suddenly notice little things such as the sensation of the sun on your skin, the taste of an orange, or the greenness of the grass on a summer's day. Becoming more aware can be like moving from a two-dimensional, black-and-white world to one that has three dimensions and is saturated with color.

STEP 2: MOVE TOWARD THE UNPLEASANT

Facing pain is essential because those of us with chronic pain' usually resist it through trying to block the pain out or else drowning in it. In neither case do we really see the pain for what it is. Over time you can learn to adopt a kindly, nonjudgmental attitude to the whole of your experience and allow painful sensations simply to be present. You can develop a caring attitude toward your pain - like that of the natural impulse of a mother to gather a child who is hurt into her arms and hold him or her tenderly. Even though she can't remove the child's pain, her loving response will ease his or her distress.

When you bring awareness and curiosity to the actual experience of pain, sadness, often you find that it's not as bad as you feared. Focusing on direct perception of the sensations rather than ideas about them brings you' into the present moment in which experience is always fluid and changing. Nothing in the world is permanent.

STEP 3: SEEKING THE PLEASANT

This third step in developing mindfulness in fact grows naturally out of the second, but it may seem even more surprising: it involves becoming sensitive to the pleasant elements of your experience. As you develop a more straightforward relationship with pain or sorrow, you make the surprising discovery that there's always something pleasant, even beautiful, in your experience when you look for it.

Step 4: BROADENING AWARENESS TO BECOME A BIGGER CONTAINER AND CULTIVATING EQUANIMITY

In the fourth step you broaden your awareness to include both the unpleasant and pleasant aspects of your experience, like switching from a focused to a wide-angle lens. In this stage, rather than focusing closely on sensations of pain or pleasure, you become aware of the diverse aspects of each moment as they come into being

and pass away without automatically pushing away the unpleasant or clinging to the pleasant. Practicing mindfulness isn't about escaping difficulty; it's about holding the whole of experience in a wider perspective with equanimity and depth. Another aspect of this fourth step is to become sensitive to and aware of other people. A final dimension of the bigger container is becoming aware of the world around you.

STEP 5: CHOICE: LEARNING TO RESPOND, RATHER THAN REACT

With this wider perspective you can move on to the fifth step: choosing to respond rather than react to your experiences, especially when they include difficulties. The sense that you have the freedom to choose how you respond is the heart of mindfulness practice.

To sum it all up, once we are aware of, ourselves, our experiences, the pleasant and unpleasant, the people around us and the whole world we become more compassionate, empathetical, and less self-centered. We will develop a sense of connectedness to others around us and this results in a happier person, a balanced person, a more intuitive person. A human being, not a human doing. A self-developed individual that is strong, resilient, wise and ready to tackle the world with sensitivity and responsibility.