

Mindfulness¹

Mindfulness is a stress management technique that involves focusing your attention on what you are experiencing moment to moment. You do not allow your mind to become fragmented with thoughts of the past and worries about the future; instead you remain fully alert in the experiences of the present moment.

Mindfulness meditation or practice can help you:

- elicit the relaxation response
- focus your concentration for thinking and doing tasks effectively
- help you gain a deeper appreciation of your life experiences

You can use mindfulness techniques when sitting quietly or when engaged in activities.

Following your breath is the primary technique of mindfulness. Gently coming back to your breath--wherever you feel your breath--helps anchor you in the present moment. (You may feel your breath as the air passes into and out of your nostrils, or in your chest, or in the in-and-out movement of your belly, or perhaps you feel the entire passage of air throughout the cycle of the inhalation and exhalation of breath.)

When rooted in the present moment with the help of attending to your breath, you can also be aware of the sensations in your body, your emotions, your thoughts, and your actions. Using mindfulness practice, you slow down in a sense and give full attention without judgment to the emotions, thoughts, actions and/or body sensations you are experiencing in the present moment. You do one activity at a time and give full awareness to your present moment experience.

Some mindfulness strategies:

- **Mindful breathing:** First thing in the morning, bring your attention to your breath. For several breathes, focus your mind on your breathing instead of on thoughts of yesterday or today. Come back to this simple strategy several times throughout the day.
- **Mindful noticing:** On your way to class or work, take a few moments to fully enjoy something in the scenery such as the wind blowing through the trees, the sounds of birds, or the sun shining on flowers.
- **Mindful walking:** On your way to a destination, attend to how you walk—for example, fully experience the way your feet move over the ground. Take some mindful breathes to help you relax and focus your awareness on your walking.
- **Mindful movement:** If you are stretching your muscles, focus your mind on how your breath moves you deeper into the stretch. Instead of allowing your mind to wander to what you will do after stretching, attend to all the sensations in your body as you stretch.

¹ Excerpted and adapted from *The Wellness Book* by Herbert Benson and Eileen M. Stuart.

- **Mindful eating:** Indulge your self in eating an orange or some other food:
 - Start by taking a few mindful breaths to relax the body.
 - Let go of the past and the future and bring your attention to the present moment.
 - Let your attitude be open and receptive.
 - Take a moment to appreciate where the orange came from; look carefully at its color, shape, and texture.
 - Notice the wonderful smell as you begin to peel it.
 - See, as if for the first time, how the orange is formed into sections and then gently break it apart.
 - Eat one section at a time, very slowly, as if you had never tasted this fruit before.
 - Give attention to how you chew. On one side of your mouth or both? How many times do you chew before swallowing? Slow down if you start to hurry.
 - Whenever you notice any distraction from the moment-to-moment experience of eating, stop with your mouth empty, take a breath, and then continue.
 - Allow feelings of enjoyment to arise as you experience the pleasure of eating mindfully.