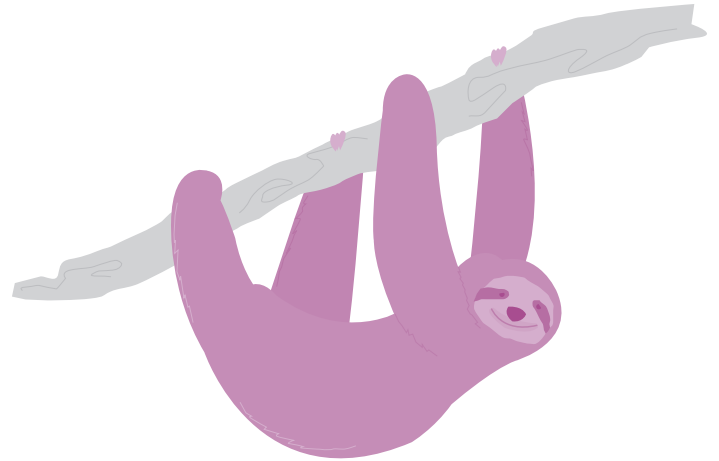


Do you want to slow down?
Accept and better manage
challenging emotions?
Spend more time living in
the present moment?



mindfulness can help! Mindfulness is a tool that anyone can use at any time. It encourages us to slow down, accept things as they are, cope well with problems or difficulties, and simply appreciate what's in our life right now.

what is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the simple act of recognizing what's going on inside of ourselves and what's going on around us, in the present moment and without judgement. Mindfulness is a tool that helps us manage thoughts and emotions, notice more of what's happening in a situation, and immerse ourselves in the present moment as it unfolds.

We can think of mindfulness as two parts: attention and curiosity.

Attention means that we take time to focus our attention and awareness on physical sensations, thoughts that come up, or the environment around us. For example, we remind ourselves to focus on things that we usually ignore such as breathing or the sensations involved in sitting. Other thoughts or sensations may appear, but they come and go.

Curiosity means that we notice things that come to our attention without judging. We are interested in the experience without trying to change it. Think of how easy it is to feel upset when a particular thought or situation comes up. Curiosity means noticing the thought or situation is happening but not reacting to it. Another aspect to curiosity is approaching different situations with no expectation of how it will make us feel. For example, if we set ourselves up to think of a daily task as a chore, we might miss a different aspect of the task that adds meaning to our day. When we are curious, we are open and genuinely interested in the thought or situation.

We'll go deeper into these two parts on the next page.

Mindfulness is not:

- Emptying the mind of thoughts or feelings
 - Ignoring thoughts, feelings, or experiences
 - Forcing yourself to relax or feel a certain way.
- Mindfulness is about recognizing and accepting what you feel, whether good or bad

where does mindfulness come from?

Mindfulness mainly comes from Buddhist meditation. However, mindfulness can be as non-religious or as spiritual as you want it to be.

Why does mindfulness matter?

Many of us unintentionally have ways of thinking that ignore or leave out other parts of the story. For example, it's common to focus only on negative aspects, make assumptions about how a situation will end, or spend a lot of time thinking about problems. Using mindfulness skills to look at the situation in a more neutral way can have a big impact on the way we understand ourselves and our world. Mindfulness slows us down and gives us time to consider different options when we're confronted with a problem, so we have the freedom to choose a response, rather than just reacting.

Mindfulness can have a positive impact on our thoughts, behaviours and overall mental well-being —and it can be useful for anyone. It may be particularly helpful for people who experience a number of mental health problems or mental illnesses, including anxiety disorders and mood disorders like depression. There is also some evidence that mindfulness may help in recovery from substance use problems and psychotic disorders, alongside medication.

How does mindfulness work?

Let's look more at the two parts of mindfulness, attention and curiosity.

Attention

We live in a fast-paced world, and there may be many demands competing for our attention. It's easy to find ourselves somewhere else, such as regretting something that happened in the past or preparing for something in the future. We do this so often that we can completely overlook the little, everyday things in front of us that bring us joy or meaning. Living in the past and the future—living outside of the present—can have a surprising impact on how we think about and understand things that are happening right now.

Curiosity

We tend to immediately pass judgement on our thoughts, our feelings, and our experiences. A misunderstanding with a friend leads to the thought that they don't really like us. An uncomfortable physical sensation leads to feelings of frustration or even fear.

Here's an example of mindfulness. Pretend that you have a very important deadline coming up at school or at work:

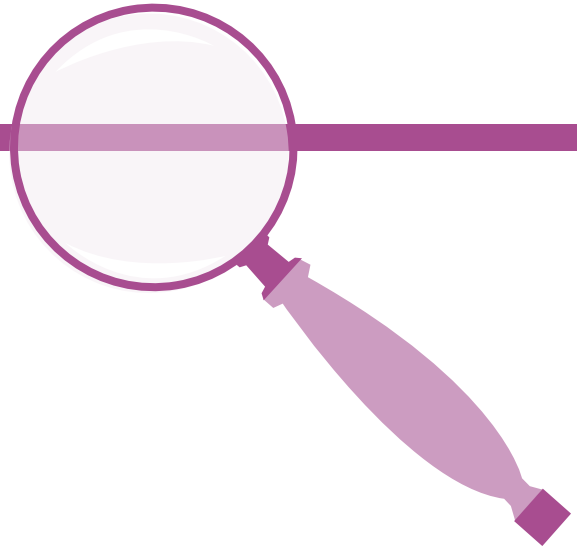
Someone who is just starting to learn about mindfulness might say, "I started to think about that deadline. What if I can't get everything done? I wish this thought would just go away. I can't handle this!" They will likely notice many different reactions to these thoughts, too. They might feel tense, upset and maybe even a little hopeless. They might find it difficult to concentrate or sleep that night.

Someone who regularly practices mindfulness might use their attention skills to recognize the same thought: "What

if I can't get everything done?" They might respond by saying, "Oh look, it's that thought. I notice how the thought is making me feel: I can sense my shoulders tensing up and my breath changing. This thought makes me feel a bit overwhelmed at this moment, and that's okay."

Of course the situation has importance—both people need to meet the same deadline. The difference is in the way our two examples dealt with the situation. The second person was more aware of the thought and how it was making them feel, and could likely use different tools or strategies to help them manage the feeling of being overwhelmed.

what does mindfulness look like?



There are a few general features of mindfulness.

A mindfulness practice usually includes:

- Observation and description of things inside and outside of us—without judgement
- Full participation—we focus all of our attention on the task
- Focusing—such as focusing on one particular sensation, like the sensation of the breath
- Compassion—for ourselves and others
- Staying in the present moment, and experiencing the present moment fully

Are you ready to try mindfulness? Here are some ideas:

- **Bring mindfulness to your meals.** Instead of eating in front of the TV or computer, really focus on what you're eating and enjoy each bite.
- **Bring mindfulness while you're getting around.** Try to turn off distractions and stay in the present moment sometimes on your commute to school or work, or while walking the dog.
- **Bring mindfulness into chores.** Purposefully focus your attention on what you're doing. Watch for the different physical sensations and thoughts that come up. What does the soap smell like, feel like, look like? Washing dishes might not seem so dull!
- **Bring mindfulness to work or school.** Check in with yourself a few times throughout the day. What are your thoughts like? How does your body feel?
- **Bring mindfulness into your relationships.** If you're talking with friends and loved ones face-to-face, put away phones or other distractions. Really listen to what they're saying, and pay attention to how it makes you feel. Enjoy each other's company without judgements or expectations.
- **Bring mindfulness to observations.** Really focus your attention on something you see or pass every day. Take note of what emotions or thoughts come up.
- **Bring mindfulness into sensations.** Spend one full minute simply following your own breath. When your mind wanders or thoughts come up, take note and gently guide your attention back to your breath. With practice, you can try to challenge yourself by adding more time.
- **Practice on a regular basis.** It's by practicing regularly that we develop the skills we can use in our daily lives. Commit to a few minutes of focusing on the breath once a day for a week. Take note of how you feel at the end of the week.

It can take a bit of work to be kind to yourself

A few things to keep in mind ...

- Start slowly—you don't have to jump into a one-hour session! Even five minutes can make a big difference.
- It's natural for your mind to wander off. Every time your mind wanders and you return to the present, you are building your mindfulness skills.
- Remember that mindfulness is called a practice for a reason—it's an important tool that takes a bit of care and nurturing to work at its best. It may be a bit challenging at times to focus on the breath for five minutes or eat dinner mindfully. It may take persistence to practice mindfulness when it feels unpleasant, but it's also an opportunity to be curious about those feelings and reactions.

where can I try mindfulness?

In therapy ...

Different evidence-based therapies include mindfulness components as well, including cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) and dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT). There are also two approaches that focus on mindfulness. Mindfulness-based stress reduction or MBSR uses mindfulness techniques to help people cope with stress or pain, and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy or MBCT uses mindfulness techniques alongside cognitive therapy. MBCT has been shown to help people with a history of depression prevent relapse. MBSR and MBCT may also help improve quality of life by improving some symptoms of disorders like fibromyalgia or irritable bowel syndrome.

On my own ...

There are many free mindfulness resources to help you get started right now! Here are a few to explore.

- **The Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention Centre of BC** has short guided recordings at www.crisiscentre.bc.ca/mindfulness. You can try short mindful practices such as body scanning and breath awareness. You can also find links to other quality mindfulness practices.
- **Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre** share youth and young adults' experiences with mindfulness at keltymentalhealth.ca/healthy-living/mindfulness. You'll also find short guided recordings and links for more resources.
- **MindShift** is a free app from AnxietyBC. It includes mindfulness techniques to help people manage anxiety. See www.anxietybc.com/mobile-app.
- **Headspace** is a meditation app and website that guides you through simple mindfulness techniques, with a goal of helping you find mindfulness strategies that work for you. See www.headspace.com.
- **Mindful magazine**, from a US non-profit agency called the Foundation for a Mindful Society, covers all aspects of mindful living. See www.mindful.org.

In a group ...

Mindfulness classes and courses are gaining in popularity, and you may be able to find a good option at a local community centre, your school, or through a local organization.

In addition, you can connect with BC resources through:

- **BCALM** (British Columbia Association for Living Mindfully), a Victoria-based organization that provides education, research, and advocacy around the benefits of mindfulness in schools, workplaces, and doctor's offices. Check out the Resources section of their website for a list of some mindfulness retreats and organizations around BC, as well as workbook resources. You can find BCALM at www.bcalm.ca.