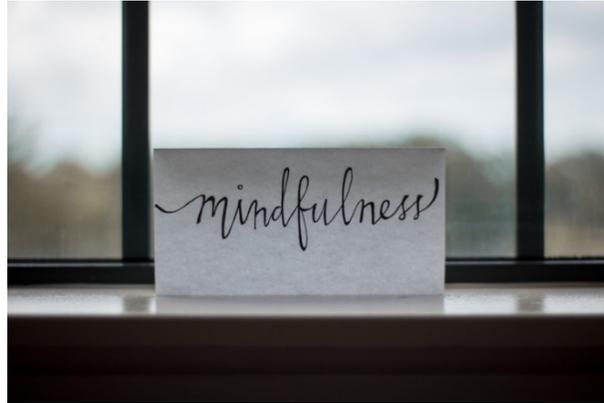


## What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the act of being present and aware of the current moment. Although this may seem like a very simple task or concept, it can be very difficult for many of us to practice it in our daily lives. We are all too often operating on “auto-pilot,” which creates a barrier to paying attention to what is happening in our lives, especially the positive.



We often distract ourselves with thoughts about the past or the future, thinking about what we should have done or what we should do next time. We can easily get stuck in patterns of negative thinking, especially when it comes to our self-esteem or our self-worth. These distractions get in the way of our ability to connect to our bodies, our thoughts, our feelings, and our environment. These distractions can also get in the way of acknowledging or appreciating the good in our lives.

Mindfulness encourages clarity and insight. It improves our quality of life and reduces stress. Once we are aware of our distractions, our negative thinking, or self-criticism, we are then able to interrupt our destructive thought patterns. This opens us up to enjoying ourselves, our environments, and our thoughts in an honest and healthy way.



Mindfulness is not a religion, although it has roots in Buddhist meditation. Anyone, with any type of belief system, may experience benefits from practicing mindfulness.

### **How can mindfulness help me?**

Practicing mindfulness has been proven to improve our physical and mental health. For instance, studies show that mindfulness:

- Lowers levels of stress
- Improves concentration
- Encourages healthy lifestyles
- Increases self-awareness
- Increases happiness

Mindfulness is also good for our hearts and our immune system. Chronic stress has been shown to decrease our immune system functioning, leaving our bodies vulnerable and weak to fighting infections. Meditation induces relaxation; this increases the development of nitric oxide, causing blood vessels to open up and blood pressure to drop.

### **How do I practice mindfulness?**

There are many different ways to practice mindfulness. Some examples are through meditation, guided imagery, breathing exercises, and physical movement. The Depression Center Toolkit provides a few examples of mindfulness exercises that you might find helpful. You may want to practice these exercises when you're not feeling stressed, so you know how to use them when you really need them.

**For more information:**

- University of Michigan Depression Center
- 1-800-475-MICH or 734-936-4400
- <http://www.depressioncenter.org/toolkit>

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