

Everyday Mindfulness Strategies to Cope with Brain Injury

Jennifer Medina, Ph.D.

Clinical Neuropsychologist

Rocky Mountain Neurobehavioral Associates

www.MountainNeuro.com

DrMedina@MountainNeuro.com

720-907-0420



Notes

What Is Mindfulness and How Can It Help?

- Mindfulness practices help cultivate awareness and being present to each moment in its fullness. As you become aware of your experiences, you begin to see them as 'conditions of the present moment' instead of 'problems'. You turn toward the experience rather than resist it or be fearful of it, embracing the reality of the present moment, pleasant or unpleasant.
- Breathing and grounding exercises can help reduce the stress response and promote a feeling of calm during difficult times.
- Mindfulness helps to develop the strength to look at reality with kindness and acceptance without using up energy wishing things were different, with a belief in your own strength and grace while knowing you are doing the very best you can.
- Mindfulness can help individuals strengthen their cognitive abilities. By paying attention on purpose and being present in the moment, we have the ability to focus on what is at hand and attend to information so that it is better consolidated in memory storage.
- Mindfulness can help achieve a positive approach to interacting with a loved one (rather than fear based or critical) by existing in the moment and attending to the feelings at hand in a nonjudgmental manner.
- Appreciating the ebbs and flows rather than ignore or turn away from them will allow you to welcome new experiences rather than dread them

Seven Essential Attitudes of Mindfulness

Nonjudging: take the position of an unbiased, nonreactive, non-critical witness to your experience without judgment

Patience: bear difficulty with calmness and self-control, have faith and courage in yourself

Beginner's mind: be open to the experience in each moment as if meeting it for the first time

Trust: of yourself and your feelings. You and you alone are the best person to know what is going on with you

Non-striving: being instead of doing, allow what is happening to happen without yearning for something more or something different

Acceptance: the willingness to see things exactly as they are in the present moment rather than as you think they are or should be

Letting Go: non-attachment, non-clinging to ideas or views about yourself, others, and situations

5-minute Mindful Breathing Exercise

Take your seat in a comfortable position. Spend a moment reflecting on the attitudes that form the foundation for mindful practice. Patience, acceptance, non-striving, letting go. Let go of any agenda about changing yourself and don't try to make anything happen. Congratulate yourself for taking some time for yourself.

Place both feet flat on the floor. Do something comfortable with your hands. Sit in a dignified way with your back, neck, and head in good alignment. Sit in a way that promotes alertness and wakefulness. Let your eyes close gently.

Bring your awareness to your breath wherever you feel it most prominently in your body. It may be at the nose, neck, chest, belly, or somewhere else. If you aren't sure, then focus on your belly. As you breathe in normally and naturally, be aware of breathing in, and as you breathe out, be aware of breathing out. Simply maintain this awareness of the breath, breathing in and breathing out.

Without judgment, watch the breath ebb and flow like waves in the sea. There's no place to go and nothing else to do, just be in the here and now, noticing the breath.

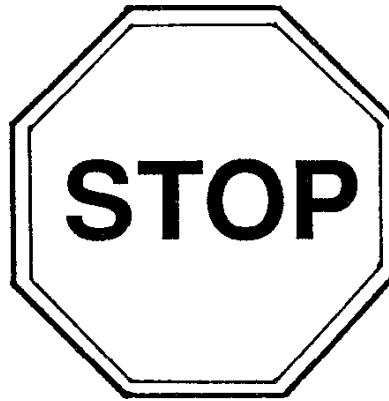
As you breathe in and out be mindful of the breath rising on the inhalation and falling on the exhalation. Just riding the waves of the breath, moment by moment, breathing in and breathing out.

From time to time, your attention may wander from the breath. When you notice this, acknowledge where your thoughts went and then gently bring your attention back to the breath. This is a moment of mindfulness.

Breathe normally and naturally without manipulating the breath in any way. Just be aware of the breath as it comes and goes. Each breath is here once and only once...welcome it.

As you come to the end of the exercise, congratulate yourself for taking this time to be present.

Stressing Out?



S	T	O	P
<p>Stop what you are doing. Put things down for a minute.</p>	<p>Take a few deep breaths. Pause to concentrate on your breath. Breathe in and out and follow the breath coming in and out of your nose.</p> <p>To help you concentrate on the breath you can say “in” on the in breath and “out” on the out breath.</p>	<p>Observe your experience just as it is, including <u>thoughts</u> <u>feelings</u> and <u>emotions</u>. Reflect about what is on your mind. Notice that thoughts are not facts and they are not permanent. Notice your emotions and how they are being expressed in your body. Name the emotions. Notice your body – where and what are the sensations in your body?</p>	<p>Proceed with what you were doing or choose to do something that will support you in the moment. Talk to a friend, stretch or rub your shoulders, have a cup of tea, go for a walk.</p>

Creating space and time during the day to STOP and allow your mind and body to be present in the moment can help alleviate the negativity associated with the daily stresses that are bound to happen throughout the day. When we STOP and become aware of the present moment we can gain perspective that allows us to see that we can control our response to difficult situations and respond more effectively.

Guided Meditation for Letting Go

Close your eyes. Ground yourself with a few full and purposeful breaths. It helps to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth a couple of times. An audible sigh on the out breath can help you to settle. When you are ready, normalize your breath and bring your attention to any areas of your body that feel tense. Breathe into those areas to soften them. This in itself is a great mediation practice you can do anytime.

Now, notice any emotions that might start to surface. Fear? Anger? Sadness? Grief? These are natural emotions that are a normal part of our human experience. Smile at them and feel how your heart sighs in relief.

Feathers

Hold your hands out in front of you like you are catching a snowflake. You can do this literally or simply visualize the action in your minds eye. Gently, with love and compassion, place those difficult emotions or experiences in the palm of your hand. One at a time works best. Imagine the emotion or experience is a feather and set it free with your breath. Watch as it's floats away...effortlessly. There is no resistance. Instead, a sense of peace.

If you do feel resistance, don't panic. Simply question the reasons why you might be resisting. Explore this with compassion and love, like you were doing this for a friend. Breathe into the resistance as much as you can. Even speak to yourself and say, "it's okay. I'm not ready yet. I will come back to this again and do my best to move through it"

No matter your experience, when you see a feather, it may remind you that you are able to transform those uncomfortable emotions by simply smiling at them and with a gently exhale, set them free.

Gratitude Practice

Gratitude is another way to bring ourselves into the present moment and become aware of our surroundings. When we cultivate gratitude in our daily lives, we increase our capacity to experience joy and pleasure.

When life circumstances are causing pain or anguish or stress it can be difficult to recognize the good things in our lives. These painful experiences are there. AND...we can choose to rejoice in the smallest gestures that bring a smile. It may be a flower blooming at your feet, the sound of a child's laughter, feeling the fresh air on your skin, or a lovely card sent to you from a kind friend.

Take a moment and quiet your troubled thoughts and change their focus to a small goodness, or just get grounded and present on your current experience. Take a breath and feel grateful for what is present. Light a candle, tell a friend, jot it down in your journal. Whatever way that works best for you, acknowledge and feel grateful for something pleasant that has occurred.

Here are some questions you can ask yourself:

- What touched me today?
- Who or what inspired me today?
- What made me smile today?
- What's the best thing that happened today?

Here are some ways you can experience gratitude in your daily life:

- Light a candle
- If you have a daily ritual, like morning coffee then add a gratitude practice
- Joy jar – keep a jar or container in an obvious place in your home, with a little pad of paper next to it. Write down your gratitudes and place them in the joy jar and watch them accumulate!
- Saying grace before meals
- Gratitude journal
- Writing thank you notes
- Keep a bulletin board or white board in the home and have the header be: Today I am thankful for...

Setting an Intention

An intention is a guiding principle for how you want to be, live, and show up in the world. Take a deep breath and call to your mind an intention you'd like to set for yourself today. This can be something deeply personal or something physical.

To treat myself with love and respect.

To find peace in my heart. Or simply, Inner Peace.

I intend to stop taking things personally.

I intend to feel calm and relaxed.

It's a continual aspiration to guide you towards balance in your life. There is no right or wrong way to set an intention. It is simply a word, phrase or quote, a dedication, or a prayer that you choose to practice being who you are.

To accept where I am today without judgment.

To lead with courage and authenticity.

I intend to lead by example.

I intend to be open to success and abundance.

You might think of a word or value.

Clarity

Simplicity

Letting Go

Joy

Compassion

Trust

Openness

Choose something that is meaningful to you.

Now breathe into that intention. Feel grounded and rooted in allowing this for yourself. Take another deep breath, acknowledge your intention, and open your eyes when you are ready.

Loving Kindness Meditation

Think about something or someone that is very dear to you. Breathe in and out as you think of this dear person or thing in your life. Identify the feeling or emotion that is attached to this thought. Maybe is it love, peace, joy, gratitude.

Breathe in and feel loving kindness for that particular person or place or thing. Draw your attention and your heart to that feeling. Use your breath to sink into this feeling.

Breathe in and send some of that same loving kindness to yourself. Wishing yourself well. Say to your self:

May I be at peace. May I be well, no matter what. Even in the midst of suffering.
May I be at peace. May I be at peace.

Breathe in and repeat this message as often as necessary. Trust that over time this is practice that can help with difficult emotions.

Breathe in and extend that circle even further to a person who matters very much to you. May they be at peace. May they be well.

Breathe in and extend the circle of loving kindness to everyone in this room. Wishing them well, wishing them to be at peace.

Breathe in and extend that circle even further. We are all connected. May the all beings be at peace. May all beings be well.

Take one last deep breath and let it flow through your body. Be aware of it.

How to Build a Mindfulness Practice

- Start with one practice at a time and build gradually.
- Make a commitment. Plan to make each practice a part of your daily routine. Actively take time out of your day to practice mindfulness. This may require you to turn off your surroundings and focus inward.
- Pick one practice per week and add from there. For example, if Week 1 is mindful breathing, this practice should carry on into Week 2. By the end of one month you will have 4 new mindful practices in your daily life.
- If one new practice per week feels like a lot, then dial it back and do one per month, or 2 per month.
- Do what's right for you and offer yourself compassion and gratitude along the way!
- In an informal way, weave mindfulness into everything you do. Notice what's happening if and when you feel "stuck" (caught up in stress reactivity and unable to free yourself). Try to practice one of the seven foundations of mindfulness practice when things feel difficult.
- Weave mindfulness into all your daily activities. Mindful cooking, mindful cleaning, mindful walking, mindful communicating. Be present and in the moment with everything that you do.
- Find a partner or community for accountability, support, and consistency.
- And remember: Your mind will wander, because this is what the mind does! Acknowledge your mind for wandering and gently draw your attention back to your mindful task. This is mindfulness!

Mindfulness Resources

Books

- *A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook* by Bob Stahl, Ph.D. and Elisha Goldstein, Ph.D.
- *Full Catastrophe Living* by Jon Kabat-Zinn
- *Calming Your Anxious Mind* by Jeffrey Brantley, M.D.
- *The Miracle of Mindfulness* by Thich Nhat Hanh
- *The Chemistry of Calm* by Henry Emmons
- *Just One Thing: Developing a Buddha Brain One Simple Practice at a Time* by Rick Hanson
- *Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love, and Wisdom* by Rick Hanson
- *A Year of Living Mindfully: 52 Quotes & Weekly Mindfulness Practices* by Richard Fields
- *Radical Acceptance* by Tara Brach

Apps

- Insight Timer (free)
- Buddhify
- Calm
- Headspace

Also try YouTube, Blogs, and Podcasts – there is lots of good content out there!