

Mindfulness

Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally. (Kabatt-Zinn)

Unlike relaxation or visualization techniques, mindfulness is a practice of noticing what is in this moment, without changing or reacting to it. The goal is to notice whatever is happening in that moment.

Meditation is the most common mindfulness practice, yet there are many different ways to practice. Yoga, dance, eating, walking, being in relationship are all ways that we can practice noticing what is in this moment without trying to change it.

Informal Mindfulness Practices

Conscious Breathing

The breath is a central part of mindfulness practices. There are many different ways to work with the breath. The following exercise is a guide to simply notice the breath exactly as it is at different times throughout the day. Some people will put a reminder on their phone to notice their breath throughout the day or they listen to mindfulness apps, like the ones listed below.

Take a moment to notice your breath as it is in this moment.

Notice how your breath enters your body. Where does your breath go? Maybe you notice it in your upper chest or maybe in your lower lungs or your belly. Practice being aware of your breath exactly as it is, not trying to change it or wishing it was different.

You might notice that your mind wanders away from the breath to thoughts and feelings. You can simply notice those thoughts and feelings and return your attention to your breath.

When you are done, maybe after 10 breaths or a few minutes, return to your regular day, knowing that you can always return to the breath.

Eating One Raisin

Holding

First, take a raisin and hold it in the palm of your hand or between your finger and thumb.

Focusing on it, imagine that you've just dropped in from Mars and have never seen an object like this before in your life.

Seeing

Take time to really see it; gaze at the raisin with care and full attention.

Let your eyes explore every part of it, examining the highlights where the light shines, the darker hollows, the folds and ridges, and any asymmetries or unique features.

Touching

Turn the raisin over between your fingers, exploring its texture, maybe with your eyes closed if that enhances your sense of touch.

Smelling

Holding the raisin beneath your nose, with each inhalation drink in any smell, aroma, or fragrance that may arise, noticing as you do this anything interesting that may be happening in your mouth or stomach.

Placing

Now slowly bring the raisin up to your lips, noticing how your hand and arm know exactly how and where to position it. Gently place the object in the mouth, without chewing, noticing how it gets into the mouth in the first place. Spend a few moments exploring the sensations of having it in your mouth, exploring it with your tongue.

Tasting

When you are ready, prepare to chew the raisin, noticing how and where it needs to be for chewing. Then, very consciously, take one or two bites into it and notice what happens, experiencing any waves of taste that emanate from it as you continue chewing. Without swallowing yet, notice the taste and texture in the mouth. Notice how these may change over time, moment by moment, as well as any changes in the raisin itself.

Swallowing

When you feel ready to swallow the raisin, see if you can first detect the intention to swallow as it comes up, so that even this is experienced consciously before you actually swallow the raisin.

Following

Finally, see if you can feel what is left of the raisin moving down into your stomach, and sense how the body as a whole is feeling after completing this exercise in mindful eating.

Adapted from: Mark Williams, John Teasdale, Zindel Segal, and Jon Kabat-Zinn (2007). *The Mindful Way through Depression: Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness*. New York: Guilford Press.

Apps and Websites to explore

Stop, Breathe & Think (App)

Smiling Mind (App for all ages) <http://smilingmind.com.au/>

<http://mindfulkids.wordpress.com/>

<http://franticworld.com/free-meditations-from-mindfulness/> (includes the 3 minute breathing space)

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sarah-rudell-beach-/8-ways-to-teach-mindfulness-to-kids_b_5611721.html