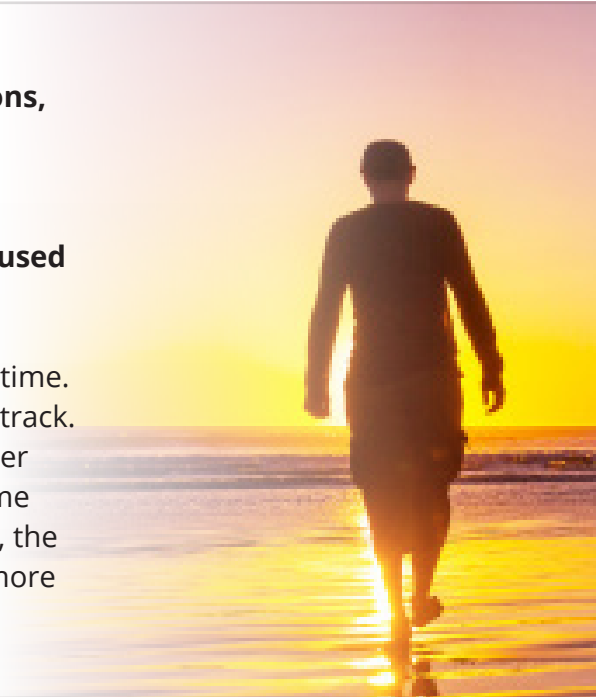


Introduction to Mindfulness

To practice mindfulness is to practice focussing on the present.

Endeavour to let go of other thoughts, feelings, emotions, senses, opinions and demands that distract you from the present. Mindfulness sits under the umbrella term of “meditation”: the practice of reaching ultimate concentration and consciousness. Mindfulness can be used in isolation or alongside other practices of meditation.

Mindfulness can be used by anyone, anywhere and at any time. From office places to retreats, from oil rigs to the athletics track. In a time when the world on average lives longer, eats better and earns more, stresses and distractions have only become more and more embedded in our day to day lives. As such, the need for individuals to practice mindfulness has become more imperative.



There is a growing body of research to support the health benefits of mindfulness which include improvements in mental health, helping to fight unhealthy eating habits, improvements in sleep, and even improvements in efficiency.

Don't be daunted by the concept of mindfulness. You may wish to learn all the concepts of meditation, or simply use the basics of mindfulness in certain activities in your life. Whatever your need, mindfulness is individual and not a competition.

“Practicing the mindfulness trainings, therefore, helps us be more calm and concentrated, and brings more insight and enlightenment.” - Thich Nhat Hanh

Preparation

Find a quiet area with few distractions. Find a comfortable position to be in. Take a deep inhale while circling your shoulders forwards and up. Exhale as you circle your shoulders back and down. Lift your head, lengthening your neck. Soften your face, and relax your eye lids. Find a comfortable position for your arms to rest.



Breath

Notice your breath. Focus all of your attention on the rhythmic rise and fall of your belly, and the flow of air in and out of your lungs.



Thoughts

While focusing, you may feel your thoughts begin to wander. Do not fight your thoughts. Acknowledge their presence, but do not become drawn into them. Observe them, and then let them go. Gently bring your focus back to your breathing.

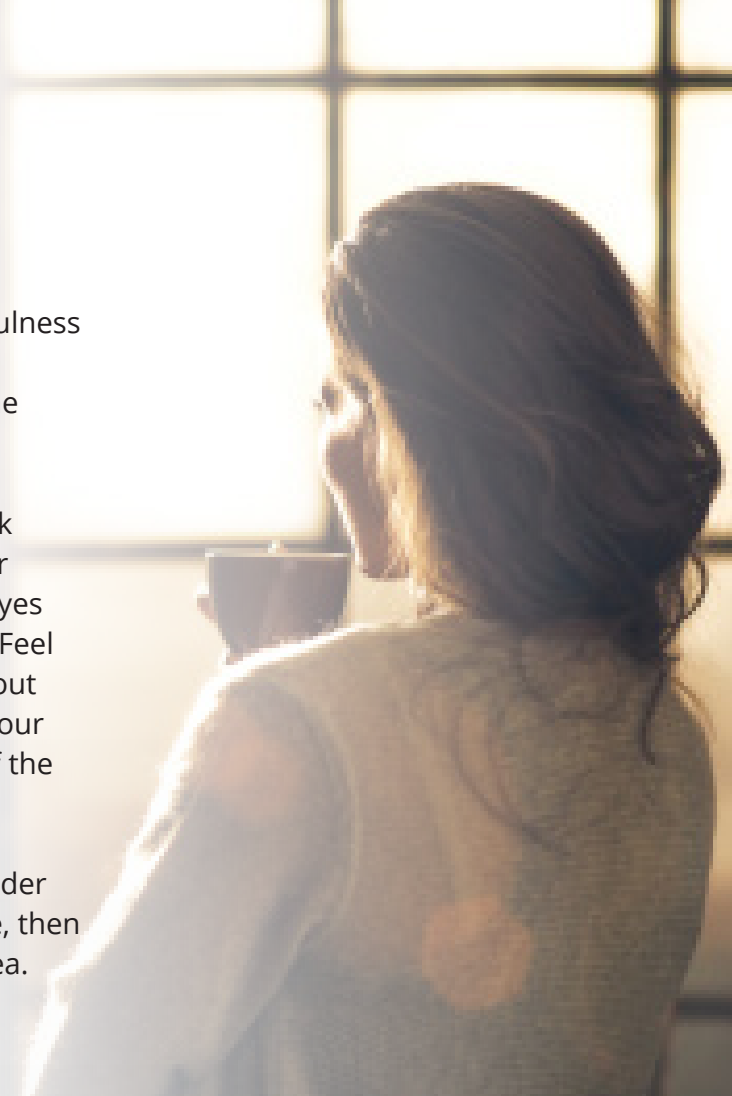


Apply to a simple task

Once you are comfortable with practicing your mindfulness with breath, try and practice mindfulness with a task or object. Start with a simple task or object. You may wish to choose a cup of tea, or the preparation of your breakfast.

Steady your breathing. Hold the cup of tea. Think about how it feels. The texture of the cup in your hands, the temperature of the cup. Close your eyes and bring the cup to your mouth. Smell the tea. Feel the warmth from the tea on your face. Think about the different scents of the tea. Bring the tea to your lips and taste the tea. Notice the temperature of the tea in your mouth and the mixture of flavours.

Throughout this task, allow any thoughts to wander through your mind. Acknowledge their presence, then allow them to pass, keeping your focus on the tea.



Gain in confidence

As you feel your mind and body focusing with your mindful practice, think about a time you are easily distracted by other thoughts. Perhaps this is when writing a report, or when sitting in a meeting. Perhaps it is during an anger distraction-thought such as those experienced at another driver. It may even be the distraction of your phone while watching television or reading a book. It may be your body distracting you away from the taste of your food and how it makes you feel, with craving thoughts.

Whatever you chose, practice focusing your attention on this one task. If you find your mind wandering to distraction, allow it to acknowledge the distraction, then bring your focus back to your task. Use your breathing throughout your task to inhale your distraction-thought, and then exhale and let your distraction-thought go, bringing your focus back to your task in the present.

