



# The Benefits of Mindfulness

## Tutor's Handbook



# The Benefits of Mindfulness

## Introduction to Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the ability to be focused on one thing without other thoughts or feelings beginning to interrupt us. While it might be a case of 'easier said than done', especially when we are so used to multi-tasking in today's fast pace society. Mindfulness is all about being still, and finding moments of stillness, even in a hectic daily routine.

Mindfulness teaches us to focus on the present, and to direct our attention to what is happening right here, right now. It also involves cultivating an attitude of kindness towards ourselves and our surroundings. This practice of living in the present is in contrast with more habitual states of mind in which we are often preoccupied with memories, day-dreams, worries or planning. Yet, the capacity to be present is in all of us and can be practiced and fully developed. Mindfulness is used to treat many conditions, including eating disorders, depression, anxiety, etc.

Mindfulness has many benefits for our health and wellbeing. These include:

- Reduce stress:

Today, people are used to multi-tasking, they have heavy workloads, are over stimulated with technology and have a range of personal and professional pressures. This can cause us to feel a lot of stress from different triggers at all times. By

focusing on just one thing, you are concentrating on only one aspect of life at a time. This can lighten your mind and make you feel better able to cope with stress and pressure from everyday life.

- Live in the moment:

Focusing your attention on being in the present helps you to forget worries and stresses that may otherwise control your thoughts and emotions, putting more stress on your physical, emotional and mental health. People who practice mindfulness techniques, express that they are able to live 'in the present' through mindfulness; to appreciate little details in their everyday life like the smell of fresh air, or the sun on their face, or the comfort of a chair. They also report that practicing mindfulness makes them more grateful in everyday life for everything they have, rather than spending time worrying about what they haven't got.

- It makes us better people:

Mindfulness does not benefit us but, according to a study by the North-Eastern University, it can also help the people we interact with since we are more compassionate.

- Helps reduce the feeling of loneliness of the elderly:

Loneliness among older people poses a real threat to their overall health. Recent research equates the effects of loneliness on our health as exerting the same damage as smoking 15 cigarettes each day. However, research tells us that practicing

mindfulness helps to reduce the levels of feelings of loneliness in older people, helping them to slow down the deterioration of health.

## Techniques for Practicing Mindfulness

There are many different techniques you can try to practice mindfulness in your everyday life. In the following section, we will present some techniques for:

- Mindful breathing
- Mindful eating
- Mindful walking

### Mindful Breathing

Mindful breathing involves sitting still, in a quiet space and bringing your mind's attention to your breath. By focusing on your breath, mindful breathing coaches you to be more aware of your surroundings and to be more 'present' in your daily life.

It is an effective method for over-coming some of the cognitive, emotional and behavioural symptoms of stress; such as not being able to concentrate, having racing thoughts, feeling agitated and out of control, and having impulse reactions to stressful episodes.

This short video will lead you through a 3-minute mindful breathing exercise: <https://youtu.be/SEfs5TJZ6Nk>

This video provides a good introduction to mindful breathing, and this exercise can be

lengthened to 5 and 10 minutes, with practice. With regular practice, you can engage in longer episodes of mindful breathing, but for now, this video is a good beginning to introduce you to this technique.

Practicing this technique on a regular basis will help to improve your overall sense of well-being.

### Mindful Eating

Mindful eating is a technique that helps you gain control over your eating habits. It has been shown to promote weight loss, reduce binge eating, and help you feel better. It is not however, to be interpreted as a diet. The reason why weight loss is linked to mindful eating is because the aim of mindful eating is to bring your attention to the food you are eating. When practicing this, you also are more mindful of how much you are eating and you tend to stop eating when you are full, rather than over-eating to finish a large meal, which results in you eating excess calories and gaining weight.

Mindful eating is the practice of using mindfulness when eating to enter a state of giving full attention to your experience, savouring the flavours of your food, physical cues such as reaching fullness and appreciating your cravings.

Mindful eating involves the following techniques:

- eating slowly and without distraction;
- listening to physical hunger cues and eating only until you're full;
- distinguishing between true hunger and non-hunger triggers for eating;
- engaging your senses by noticing colours, smells, sounds, textures, and flavours;
- learning to cope with guilt and anxiety about food;
- eating to maintain overall health and well-being;
- noticing the effects food has on your feelings and figure;
- appreciating your food.

## Mindful Walking

Mindful walking is a simple technique that you can practice to bring more mindfulness into your daily routine. This is a very effective method of practicing mindfulness, it involves bring your attention to your walking. Mindfulness expert, Padraig O'Morain, offers the following advice for people getting started in mindful walking:

- Mindful walking is as simple and as complicated as maintaining – as best you can – your awareness of the fact that you are walking.

- You might try to be aware of each footstep.
- You might harmonise your walking with your breathing.
- You might note sounds around you.
- If you are walking at home you might notice creaks in floorboards.
- If you try to do all these things at once, you will end up in a knot. So it's best to settle on just one or two ways to do this practice.
- I try to be aware of my feet against the floor and of sounds.

When practicing mindfulness, you need to make sure that when your mind begins to wander away from your footsteps, try and bring your attention back to that and let go of your other worries and thoughts.

## How to use this Resource with your Local Health Group?

This handbook presents some introductory information on mindfulness, the benefits of mindfulness and some simple techniques you can practice to include mindfulness in your daily routines. To use this resource with your local group, we recommend that you first play the short video lecture and then lead a group discussion about mindfulness, before practicing some of the techniques described in this handbook.

To accompany this handbook, you will also find a short PowerPoint presentation that can be used with your local health network. This presentation contains a copy of some

of the main points from this handbook and details on how to practice the mindfulness techniques explained. We recommend that you use this PowerPoint to introduce some of these mindfulness techniques to the group.

## Group Activity

Once you have shared the digital resource and the PowerPoint presentation with your group members, you can start a group discussion about mindfulness. Start this discussion by asking the group:

- Have you ever heard of mindfulness?
- Are you aware of the benefits of mindfulness?
- Have you ever practiced mindfulness?

Once all group members have had the opportunity to share their experiences, you should introduce some of the techniques explained in this handbook to your group. For this, please use the slides 5-10 in the accompanying PowerPoint presentation. Begin by introducing mindful breathing and lead the group through the mindful breathing techniques explained in the YouTube video. For the mindful eating technique, you will need to bring some food items into the session. For this activity, we recommend bring fresh fruit so that network members can practice savouring the flavours and textures of the food. In the final activity, introduce mindful walking.

You can introduce the steps in this exercise using the PowerPoint slides, and then give all members 5-10 minutes to practice this technique. They can choose to walk around the room or outside. After each technique is practiced, you should hold a short verbal feedback session with the group to see how they found the exercise and to ask if they would use this technique in their daily routine.



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