

How to Be Mindful if You Hate Meditating

There's a certain disconnect that plagues almost everyone nowadays: Your body is doing one thing—sitting in a meeting, eating dinner with the family—while your brain is miles away.

Some might call it multitasking, but mental-health experts say it's more problematic. Corrie Goldberg, a clinical psychologist and founder of Shore Therapy Center for Wellness in the Chicago area, says that a lack of mindfulness can deprive us of a deep connection to our most meaningful experiences. "Our body moves through the motions of life, but our head isn't in the game," she says. Not being grounded in the moment—instead allowing our thoughts to skip from place to place—is an open invitation to stress and unpleasant emotions. "Our minds tend to focus on worries about the future, or upsets from the past, even when our body may be in a neutral or pleasant place."

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Enter mindfulness. The now-ubiquitous concept, which is rooted in Buddhism, has surged in popularity in recent years and is generally defined as turning your attention inward and maintaining an awareness of your thoughts, bodily sensations, and environment. The benefits are vast. A mindfulness practice can help [lower stress](#), reduce anxiety ([as effectively as medication](#), in some cases), increase a person's capacity to [savor positive experiences](#), stop [rumination](#), [promote concentration](#), and more.

Mindfulness can also help cure the blahs. Three years into the pandemic, Kelly Neupert, a psychotherapist in Chicago, says that many of her clients feel like they're languishing. Becoming more mindful has helped them get in touch with what they're feeling and why, she says—and cultivated a greater capacity to handle life's curveballs. After adopting a [mindfulness practice](#), "I typically see that they're less reactive and more intentional," Neupert says. "They can respond to other people rather than react. The things that used to set them off, like running late for work or getting cut off, feel more tolerable."

Meditation is the best-known way to achieve mindfulness—but it isn't appealing to and doesn't work for everyone. Some find that it's awkward, or that they have trouble sitting still.

Fortunately, “a person can practice mindfulness while engaged in literally any activity,” Goldberg says, and with any available amount of time.

Here are eight ways to practice mindfulness if meditation isn’t your thing.

Listen to music

[Sound](#) can be energizing, calming, or both. Getting lost in a good song is considered an effective way to practice mindfulness.

Before deciding to engage mindfully with any activity, including listening to a favorite album, consider what counts as focused attention, Goldberg advises. That way, you’ll be able to tell if your mind starts to wander. For example, being focused on your playlist might mean “noticing the melody, observing how your body feels and moves without judgment, or focusing on the words of the song or the sound of the instruments,” she says. If you’re midway through a tune and notice you’re thinking about your grocery list, let the thought go and return your attention to mindfully listening to the beat.

Walk your dog

Say you’re heading outside with your mini schnauzer. Instead

of allowing your mind to drift to the workday ahead, or the errands you need to run, stay focused on the present by cataloging all the things your senses are experiencing, advises Joy Rains, author of *Meditation Illuminated: Simple Ways to Manage Your Busy Mind*. "Notice your dog's tail wagging, the sounds of his panting or his nails clicking on the pavement, and the feel of his warm breath," she says. "Any time your mind wanders, gently shift your attention back to your dog, even if it's every second or two."

Focus on your movements

As you walk into the office in the morning—or through any other doors that make you nervous—aim to focus solely on your movements. Rains suggests paying special attention to your feet connecting with the ground, and repeating the words "lifting, moving, placing, shifting." "As you lift your right leg, silently say 'lifting,'" she instructs. As you move forward, say "moving," and then "placing" as you make contact with the ground. As you shift your weight to the other foot, note what you're doing. Then begin the process again with your left leg. "Continue silently repeating these words to yourself as you walk," Rains says. Doing so will help ward off unwelcome worries.

Soak up nature

Research suggests that spending even brief amounts of time

in nature promotes [well-being](#), [a pleasant mood](#), and [alertness](#). And a [meta-analysis](#) published in 2019 concluded that “nature-based mindfulness is moderately superior to mindfulness conducted in non-natural settings.”

If you want to [get mindful in nature](#), head to a park or favorite trail for a walk or run. Pick one sense to focus on, suggests Maureen Kane, a therapist based in Bellingham, Wash. If you choose sight, for example, ask yourself: What are you seeing, what colors stand out, and what textures can you identify? As Kane puts it: “How many blue things are there? Are there patterns in the leaves?” Or maybe you’ll spend time with sound. Pay attention to what you hear—the far-away sounds, as well as those overhead. “Every time your mind wanders, go back to the sense you were focusing on, or switch it if you get bored,” she says.

Take a beverage break

Coffee has a way of disappearing before you even notice you’re drinking it, especially on busy mornings. Mindfulness experts suggest carving out a few minutes to truly savor your hot drink of choice. “Feel your mug with your hands, and smell the aroma,” Kane suggests. “How does your drink feel when it passes your lips, rolls over your tongue, goes down your throat?” Mulling over these questions will help you stay grounded and start your day on a positive note.

Use the 5-4-3-2-1 method

One popular mindfulness exercise can be particularly helpful in moments of panic, when you're [grasping for shortcuts to calm](#). The 5-4-3-2-1 method, as it's often called, involves using all five senses to "get into your body and out of your busy mind," says Tina Hnatiuk, a mindfulness teacher in British Columbia.

She describes it like this: Identify five things that you can see, and four things you can touch. Then listen for three things you can hear, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste—or that you're grateful for. The exercise helps people feel "safe, calm, and at peace," Hnatiuk notes.

Do a puzzle

The missing piece of your mindfulness routine might be working on a puzzle. In addition to being a fun way to pass time, experts say jigsaw puzzles exercise your brain, foster creativity, and promote mindfulness.

Neupert likes puzzles because they offer structure, without an overwhelming amount of rules. As you start fitting together knobs and holes, she suggests asking yourself these questions: "What does the puzzle piece feel like in your hands? What does the picture on the box look like? How does it feel to fit two pieces together? Do you feel

urgency to finish it, or content going at your own speed?" All can help center you in the present, pushing away thoughts about what's about to happen or what's already occurred.

Spend time journaling

Writing in a journal can [decrease stress](#), help [nurture a positive mood](#), and [improve short-term memory](#). Experts say journaling two or three times a week is an excellent way to become more mindful and glean helpful insights about your everyday life.

If you don't know how to get started, take the pressure off: Rather than following a specific prompt, Neupert recommends adopting a free-form approach. "Just brain dump anything that's happening in your mind, without judgment," she says. "Any thoughts you're having, anything you're noticing around the room, anything you're noticing in your body—just write it down." Don't worry about grammar or selecting sophisticated words; instead, think of the exercise as cultivating curiosity about what's happening in your body and mind at that very moment, she says.

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