



# Mindfulness Meditation

What is Mindfulness Meditation? This is a technique of meditation that involves paying attention in a particular way - on purpose - in the present moment without judgment. In this non-reactive state, we do not judge any experience as good or bad. Or if we do make those judgments we simply observe them and then let them go.

What are the benefits of mindfulness meditation? Several studies have shown that mindfulness meditation can lead to:

- A decrease in stress and anxiety
- Improvements in concentration and attention
- Improvement in focus under pressure
- Improvements in academic achievement
- Increase in self-awareness and over all emotional well-being
- Improvements in sleep quality

How does mindfulness meditation work?

- Studies show that improving our ability to sustain our attention on our breathing over long periods of time transfers over to other pursuits like studying and taking exams
- Stress reduces what's called "working memory capacity" which is our ability to retain thoughts in our mind. Those who practice mindfulness meditation improved this capacity while reducing levels of stress
- Improves emotional self-regulation because we can become less reactive and judgmental of your experiences and feelings
- Improves other types of self-regulation like the ability to direct attention and behavior, suppress inappropriate knee-jerk responses and demonstrate flexible problem solving skills

- Increases activity in the brain associated with positive emotion – the pre-frontal cortex – which is generally less active in people who are depressed
- Helps to lower blood pressure, which lowers the risk for cardiovascular disease
- Calms the mind and helps reduce “mental clutter”
- Helps to lower cortisol, which is a stress-producing hormone that can keep you awake

## How do I start practicing Mindfulness Meditation?

There is a range of ways to meditate, starting with very brief amounts of time. Do not worry about doing this perfectly.

Here are some simple steps that you can use as a guide:

- If you can, find a quiet space to use regularly. This can be very challenging in college! You can try the library; or if the noise in your residence hall isn't too loud, you can practice meditation that focuses on becoming aware of the sounds around you. For example, you can pay attention to the number of sounds, the quality of them, and how they come and go.
- Sit or stand in a comfortable posture, vertical but relaxed.
- Take a moment to notice body sensations: tightness, tension, etc. There's nothing you have to do about them; just notice them.
- Establish an intention for the meditation, for instance, to be aware of body sensations, to give yourself compassion or loving kindness, or to notice that thoughts come and go.
- Use guided meditations to help you to remain focused. See the list below for meditations on the web and phone apps you can download.
- Once you have practice with guided meditations, you can meditate on your own, noticing what works best for you.
- It's important to start slowly: try 5 to 10 minutes a day and gradually increase to a maximum of 45 minutes a day. Simply try what will work best for you.

## Helpful phone apps and websites:

- ✓ **Buddhify 2:** "the mindfulness app for your modern life." Dozens of custom meditations for 14 different parts of your day. Cost is \$1.99.
- ✓ **Conscious:** increase your mindfulness and awareness by taking simple and effective daily challenges alongside other like-minded people. Free.
- ✓ **eCBT Calm:** helps people who are feeling stressed and want to learn relaxation skills. It assesses your stress level, provides relaxation skills, and also includes links to online resources for stress and anxiety. For iPhone. Cost is \$.99.

- ✓ **Headspace (on-the-go).** Meditation app with quick techniques to "help you sleep better, focus more, & get some relief from a busy mind." For iPhone. Free.
- ✓ **iZen Garden for iPad:** Create your own Zen garden (with a rake, sand and rocks..). Cost is \$4.99.
- ✓ **Meditation 4 Inner Wisdom:** guided meditation/self-hypnosis. Free.
- ✓ **Mindfulness Meditation:** guided meditations ranging from 5 to 40 minutes; includes an audio guide to meditation. Cost is \$1.99.
- ✓ **Mindful Meditation Hypnosis by Subliminal Affirmations.** Choose a short or long session of hypnosis led by Rachael Meadows. Free with in app purchases.
- ✓ **Simply Being-- Guided Meditation for Relaxation & Presence.** A highly acclaimed meditation app that provides 4 meditation times and gives you options of background music or nature sounds. Cost is \$.99.
- ✓ **Stop, Breathe, & Think:** Become more mindful and compassionate using the meditation guide. Check-in daily, track your progress, and feel the calm. Free with in-app purchases.
- ✓ **Take a Break-- Guided Meditations for Stress Relief.** Includes Work Break Relaxation (7 min.) and Stress Relief Meditation (13 min.). Free.

### Sources:

- American Mindfulness Research Association
- UCLA Mindful Awareness Resource Center
- Humbolt State University CAPS website