

Mindfulness in everyday life

Mindfulness is a form of self-awareness training adapted from Buddhist mindfulness meditation. It has been adapted for use in treatment of depression, especially preventing relapse and for assisting with mood regulation.



What this fact sheet covers:

- What is mindfulness?
- Examples of mindfulness techniques
- How can mindfulness help?

Mindfulness Techniques to Practise

One Minute Exercise

Sit in front of a clock or watch that you can use to time the passing of one minute. Your task is to focus your entire attention on your breathing, and nothing else, for the minute. Have a go - do it now.

Mindful Eating

This involves sitting down at a table and eating a meal without engaging in any other activities - no newspaper, book, TV, radio, music, or talking.

Now eat your meal paying full attention to which piece of food you select to eat, how it looks, how it smells, how you cut the food, the muscles you use to raise it to your mouth, the texture and taste of the food as you chew it slowly.

You may be amazed at how different food tastes when eaten in this way and how filling a meal can be.

Mindful Walking

Here the same principle, while walking concentrate on the feel of the ground under your feet, you're breathing while walking. Just observe what is around you as you walk, staying **in the present**. Let your other thoughts go, just look at the sky, the view, the other walkers; feel the wind, the temperature on your skin; enjoy the moment.



De-stressing Exercise

Bring yourself into the present by deliberately adopting an erect and dignified posture.

Then ask yourself, “What is going on with me at the moment?”

You simply allow yourself to observe whatever happens. Label any thoughts that you have and then leave them alone....just be prepared to let them float away. Attend to your breathing or simply take in your surroundings instead.

Besides thoughts, there may be sounds you hear, bodily sensations that you are aware of. If you find yourself constantly elaborating on thoughts, rather than labelling them and returning to the neutral, remember to observe your breathing.

When emotions or memories of painful events occur, don't allow yourself to become caught up by them.

Give them short labels such as, “that's a sad feeling” and “that's an angry feeling,” then just allow them to drift or float away. These memories and feelings will gradually decrease in intensity and frequency.

More importantly, you will begin to identify yourself as an objective observer or witness, rather than a person who is disturbed by these thoughts and feelings. This requires practise but can then be used when ever you are stressed.

Associated Breathing Exercise

Stay with any distressing thoughts for a few moments, then as you let them float away, you gently redirect your full attention to your breathing.

Pay attention to each breath in and out as they follow rhythmically one after the other. This will ground you in the present and help you to move into a state of awareness and stillness.

How can mindfulness help?

We all have the capacity to be mindful. It simply involves cultivating our ability to pay attention in the present moment and allows us to disengage from mental “clutter” and to have a clear mind. It makes it possible for us to respond rather than react to situations, thus improving our decision making and potential for physical and mental relaxation. It is not simply a relaxation technique or ‘power of positive thinking’. The technique is based on Buddhist meditation principles but was described by Teasdale et al. for use in treatment of depression.

Linehan (1993) also used mindfulness as a core skill in her cognitive behavioural therapy for Borderline Personality Disorder. Linehan (1993) describes three “what” skills: observing (simply attending to events and emotions), describing (applying labels to behaviours, emotions and situations) and participating (entering into current activities) and three “how” skills: taking a ‘no judgemental’ stance, focusing on one thing in the moment and being effective (doing what is needed rather than worrying about what is right or second guessing the situation). These are all included in the ‘de-stressing’ exercise.

Mindfulness can be incorporated into the treatment of those suffering from bipolar. Research by Black Dog Institute, and others, has shown that mindfulness can have a positive effect on people experiencing bipolar disorder due to the way it can improve emotional regulation and reduce the symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Mindfulness takes practice and daily sessions can be entered on the mood chart (also available at the Black Dog Institute website www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/factsheets).



Reference List

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Contact Us

Email: blackdog@blackdog.org.au
Phone: (02) 9382 4530

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