

## **In the moment: Simple Mindfulness to reconnect with yourself**

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What do you imagine when you listen to the word “mindfulness”? Many of my friends believe that mindfulness is sitting in mediation and doing “nothing”. I get that, when we do “nothing” we get bored! However, mindfulness is not about that.

Before I explain what mindfulness is, I’ll get you first to think *why* it could be interesting to learn mindfulness. Think about your studies for a moment—have there been times when you’ve felt stressed, overwhelmed or pressured? Maybe it’s the homework due tonight or the presentation you have tomorrow. And what about midterms and finals—do they make you feel extra anxious? When that happens, do you stay focused or do you usually end up procrastinating until the deadline is right on top of you? If you answered yes to at least one of these questions, then you might want to learn how mindfulness can become a handy tool to face any of these challenges. Let’s start!

### **What is mindfulness?**

Mindful practice is bringing your *full* conscious attention to the present by allowing your body and mind to experience moment-to-moment with a more grounded sense of reality. When practicing mindfulness, you become the observer of your thoughts and feelings, and along this process, begin to understand yourself in a clearer way.

Feelings of stress and anxiety often come from making a thought, issue or emotion feel bigger than what it actually is, especially when we start to overthink. Though coping responses vary from person to person, many times they lead to undesired reactions or behaviors such as anger, overeating or isolating yourself from others.

Mindfulness can help you become aware about *how* you react to different situations, and as you understand more about yourself, you can also develop better skills and adjust your responses, this is called self-regulation (Baltzel, 2016; Palmer & Rodger, 2009). For example, when faced with the pressure, anxiety or overwhelming feelings of an upcoming exam you can pause for a second and notice what is happening within you, are you getting caught up in racing thoughts or panic? Take a few moments to focus on your breathing, and gently bring your attention to the present moment. Observe your thoughts and feelings without judging them and become aware of the space happening

in between your inner experience and how you want to respond. By creating this space you can calm down and choose your next step such as, taking a short break or returning to study, *feel* what is best for you in that moment and whatever your choice is *allow* yourself to go ahead.

As you can see, mindfulness can be practiced by anyone who would like to improve the quality of their life. Also, mindfulness can be practiced in many different settings, such as sitting, laying down, walking or eating. There are four simple aspects essential to practice mindfulness:

- 1) a quiet environment
- 2) a comfortable position
- 3) a point of focus for the mind, and
- 4) being non-judgmental, keep an open mind

Let's do a simple mindfulness exercise to reconnect with yourself. Ready? Find a chair to sit comfortably and take three deep breaths. Then, with each breath you take you'll feel more and more relaxed. Feel the weight of your body being transferred onto the chair. Begin to notice how your feet touch the floor. Then, gently bring your attention to your legs, knees, upper thigh, and gradually move up throughout your whole body all the way to your head. If you notice any tension just let it be; do not judge it. Just let the mind become aware of it, and kindly bring its attention to the next area. Through this process, the mind and the body become one, so there is no need for struggle, allow yourself to *be* in the process. Focus your attention on each sensation, stay with it for a few seconds, become the observer of your thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Notice how they arise and just let them go.

Some people might struggle to notice their experience, so here are some questions to help you out:

- What do I see?
- What do I hear?
- What do I smell?
- What sensations does my body have?
- What do I taste?
- How do I feel? Sad, anxious, happy

If you become distracted during this process, it's ok, just gently bring your attention back to where you were and continue, remember not to judge, allow yourself to be open to the experience and accept all of who you are in this moment. And, whenever you are ready, slowly begin to make small movements to gradually bring your awareness back to your mind, body, and into your

environment. Avoid standing up too quickly, as it may cause dizziness or light headedness.

### **Mindful living**

Dealing with school pressure can take a toll, both on your body and mind. Practicing mindful living helps you become aware of how stress affects you by understanding where your feelings come from, and offers simple ways to stay grounded, focused and calm, even when you're super busy. While change unfolds gradually, each small step is also a big step. Whether you're able to spend 2 minutes or a full hour— it's your journey, so take it at your own pace.

### **References**

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