

Mindfulness FAQ Answered

What is it?

Mindfulness is the act of tuning into the present moment. Often, we're reminiscing about the past or anticipating the future, mindfulness brings us back to what's happening right now and gives us the power to make an impact in the only time we truly can.

Why is it worth practising?

When our mind is constantly focused on the past, this can lead to depression or guilt, while thoughts anticipating the future can trigger anxiety – the practice of keeping your mind in the present can improve your mood, concentration and creativity. It can also give you back the time and ability to RESPOND rather than REACT to situations, using creative problem-solving to avoid snap judgements or reactions based on fear which can lead to further problems.

How do you practice this magical thing?

There are so many ways to practice and one of the best ways to strengthen your mindfulness muscles is through meditation! Meditation is the formal practice of keeping your mind focused in the present so it becomes easier to do it when you're out in public/in a less controlled environment. All you need for meditation is a quiet, undisturbed space (that means no phone or email alerts!), a comfortable place to lie or sit depending on your preference (as well as comfortable clothing to lie or sit IN) and a timer that's not going to make you jump two feet in the air at the end of your practice. A guided meditation featuring a voice you enjoy listening to is also an excellent option (especially for people just starting out on the mindfulness journey). Set your timer or start your meditation and you're good to go.

What if my mind is a jerk who won't stop thinking?

Fortunately/unfortunately, your mind likes to think and meditation will never obliterate all of your thoughts for the duration of your practice. Instead, the point of meditation is to create awareness around the thoughts you're having so you can notice them and then let them sail on. Like the thought that you're a terrible meditator, for instance...just let that unproductive thought go. Think of every thought you send on its way as another chance to flex your mindfulness muscle because, really, if your practice was thought-free you wouldn't have the opportunity to actually strengthen your ability to re-focus.

The main idea is that you meditate to practice the art of returning to the present moment at a time where there are no stakes attached. That way, when you're in a situation when there are

(let's say a big presentation in front of an important potential client, for example) your mindfulness muscles are strong and a thought like, "Oh god, I know I'm going to screw this up," will just be another one you can send on its merry way.

When Can I Call My Practice a Success?

If you're like me, you may have completed your practice and said, "Huh, I'm not sure that really counted, I just wanted to call it quits the whole time." Or maybe your meditation was like a dream; you laid down under a fluffy blanket and the next thing you knew your meditation was over. Either way, I'm happy to congratulate you on a "successful meditation!"

The really cool (and frustrating) thing about meditations is that they're all about 'being' rather than 'doing' and the world of being lies outside the realm of accomplishments and achievements. If your ultimate motivator for meditation is for the bragging rights, you might be missing the point a little bit. Meditation is the best way to unplug from a world that tends to be overly concerned about 'doing things' and 'succeeding' to get reconnected with the wholeness of who already are, right now, at this moment, without doing a single thing.

In my opinion, you can call your practice a success, anytime you give your practice your best shot. No, that doesn't mean practising for 5 of your 15 minutes and saying, "Well, I tried!" That means, sitting through that whole 15 minutes bringing your mind back from thought after random thought with patience for your monkey mind and compassion for a person who's doing something that many call too difficult to even try.

When does mindfulness become a super power?

I'm so glad you asked this question! Since mindfulness is awareness of the present moment it basically unlocks doors and presents opportunities that aren't available to people living most of their days in the past or the future. Recently, I attended a workshop run by Dr. Joe Dispenza called *Becoming Supernatural* that featured this topic and, according to Dispenza, many of us are living our lives in the past and anticipating our futures based on our known pasts.

This happens because, day in and day out, we're experiencing a lot of the same thoughts, repeating the same routines, and watching ourselves exhibit the same behaviours. We hang out with the same people, we react to situations the same way...basically we allow ourselves to run on programs that become instinctual because they're so familiar to us. Think about when you've taken a route so many times you barely need to think about making that left-hand turn because your body just automatically takes over the wheel. This kind of programming can and does show up in all different parts of our lives...how we react to stress, conflict, boredom (ever whip out your phone in a dull moment before you could even think to do it?) and as efficient as running on autopilot can be, it doesn't leave space for trying new and improved options.

This is where mindful awareness swoops in. When you're totally in the moment, you can tweak the program. Remember last time you reacted like that toward so-and-so and regretted it

afterwards? This time, you realize you get to respond any way you'd like to and, even though you feel yourself wanting to react the same way you did last time...you don't. You choose a different option, get a different result and you realize...wow, I've got the power to make serious changes in my life. It sounds simple because it is but it takes an intention to stay aware because when the going gets tough, most people go into survival mode and that's where we run our unconscious programming from.

It takes courage to make the shift to being in the now because sometimes it's an uncomfortable place to be. When we're feeling things like fear, guilt, boredom, blame, awkwardness, our first instinct is to escape that moment..."See ya later, yucky feelings, I'm going to dive into facebook/the fridge/Netflix/insert distraction of choice here." But if you stay with the now and ride out the ickiness, you'll start to notice the real impact you can make on your life. Suddenly, those relationship/work/health problems will get worked out because – here's the thing – if you can stay connected to your mindfulness, your mind will be connected to the collective consciousness which is also known as universal or source energy. Essentially, the way I describe the collective consciousness is as the energy that connects us all with universal experiences like love, joy, compassion, and peace. This is the energy we tap into for things like intuition and quantum leaps that bring original ideas, and also explains the many ways we affect others without even being in the same physical space.

Can I practise for 5 minutes a day and still experience the super powers?

This is also a great question! The short answer is "YES!" but there's a caveat – you 'can' definitely reap benefits from a 5-minute meditation but many people might not. This is because it tends to take at least 5 minutes (sometimes longer) to settle your monkey mind into the meditation. Just think of it like taking a nap...would 5 minutes be long enough? Maybe if you're like my husband who's asleep before your head hits the pillow! But if you're like me and many others, you need some time to settle in under those sheets and consciously leave your day behind before the sandman finds you.

Another thing about such a short period of time is that time is relative so (and I'm speaking from my own experience here) you think, "Five minutes, that's nothing – I can do that!" you sit down to do it and it feels like F-O-R-E-V-E-R. You think years have gone by, you check your timer, and it's only been 2 minutes (true story!) Although it may seem a little counterintuitive, when you're prepared for a longer time on your mat/cushion/bed and start into a 15, 20, 30 meditation, it can actually feel more tolerable because a) you're expecting a longer practice and b) you have time to relax into it.

My best answer to this question would be to experiment. Try 5 minutes every day for a week and see how you feel...do you feel refreshed after your practice? Do you feel like your practice is spilling out into your daily life (e.g. you feel more focused, slower to react/more likely to thoughtfully respond to situations, are you experiencing less stress and anxiety?) And then try longer practices. Challenge yourself to do 20-30 minutes daily (that's my meditation sweet spot) for seven days or more and notice how your life changes.

Personally, I'm all about a good challenge and I like to do things that I never would've expected myself to be able to do. I said earlier that meditation isn't about the bragging rights but you can certainly pat yourself on the back for putting time into a habit that I can't speak highly enough of. I really feel like I haven't scratched the surface of why I feel meditation/mindfulness is the cornerstone of health and wellness but hopefully I've peaked your interest enough to try it out for yourself!