

Mindfulness Explained

According to Robert Cooke,

"Mindfulness meditation is the process of being present during a given moment. Mindfulness meditation is being attentive to the sensory information entering your mind through your five senses. By using the mindfulness meditation techniques given on this page you can become more alive and conscious of the moment at hand. Stress and worry disappear when you are practicing mindfulness meditation as you are not reliving the mistakes of the past, as we all so often do, or anxiously thinking of the future. All that exists in mindfulness meditation is this moment. You will also find beauty and tranquility in everything that you do as a result of placing your attention on what you are doing at any given time - the end result being that you will be more awake; freed from the slavery of your wayward mind.

Exercises in Mindfulness Meditation

Practicing Mindfulness - How conscious are you of your body? While you are sitting here in front of your computer, how conscious are you of incoming sensory information. Take a moment now to feel your body. How are your arms and legs positioned? Is there any tension - maybe in your neck or back? What is your facial expression? Note how you are now noticing sensations that you were previously unaware of. This is mindfulness. Now simply place your attention on each part of your body from your toes to the top of your head, one small section at a time, and notice what each part is feeling. Now being aware of your body as a whole, get up and go out to the letterbox or over to the photocopier or whatever you have to do next and be totally aware of your body. Feel how you move and how you balance yourself as you walk. If you feel a little weird at first don't worry. You're not alone there.

When initially practicing mindfulness you might feel like your actions are a little forced or robotic. This is because your brain has thousands of little automatic routines that it has picked up over the years to perform all of the actions that you probably take for granted. Things like scratching your head, writing, walking, blowing your nose or lifting your coffee cup to your mouth are all things that you have done hundreds if not thousands of times before and all mostly automatically. This has built up a set of automated responses in your brain much the same way as Pavlov's dog was trained. When you are performing an action with mindfulness you are overriding these routines and that is why you might feel a little "weird". While these routines can be quite useful in dangerous situations such as jumping out of the way of an oncoming car, the goal of mindfulness is to be conscious of your actions rather than reacting unconsciously.

Living Mindfulness - Looking and Really Seeing. For people who have normal vision, sight is the most dominant of all of the senses. We use our eyes every second of our waking day yet how often do we take the time to actually see what we are looking at? We will take that time now to practice mindfulness of sight.

Raise your left hand and hold it before your eyes. Simply relax the hand and allow your attention to rest on it. Notice the lines, the curves, the shapes within your hand. All you are doing now is looking. It's important when being mindful not to internally verbalise your experience. What you are doing during mindfulness is examining the raw data coming in from your senses.

Another useful exercise is to look at a page of text (preferably on paper rather than computer

screen) and notice how familiar the letters look and how your brain tends to recognise words and structure without actually looking at the details of the curves of the letters. Now as a contrast try looking at the same page of text in a mirror and see how differently your mind treats it. Note how when your mind conceptualises something the rawness of the experience is lost.

Try keeping your attention on your visual sense for a while and just enjoy the experience. Note how different the world looks now that you are seeing the world with the freshness of a child; seeing things for the first time. This is real mindfulness.

A Musical Mindfulness Experience. Choose a CD or tape with a largely musical component. For the reasons given in the help box (indicated by the helpful looking fairy godmother) above it is better not to choose music with a lot of lyric because the mind tends to focus on the meaning of the words rather than the raw experience of listening. i.e. your mind tends to wander off in a world created by the interpretation of the words.

Sitting in a relaxed position, preferably one in which your body is upright to avoid falling asleep, press play on your tape or CD player and simply listen to the music. Hear the raw sounds of the instruments and just experience the music for what it is. For the time you are doing this exercise the music is all that exists.

When you are practicing mindfulness in everyday life you will begin to notice little things about yourself, about your mind and about being human that you probably have never noticed before. For this reason it is a good idea to keep a journal in which you can write any of these thoughts down. But remember, the idea of mindfulness is not to analyse but simply to be attentive and notice the experiences you are having at this moment. By analysing your experiences you are living in the past or projecting into the future. Mindfulness is about "now".

You will probably find that keeping your attention on the music for long is challenging. Thoughts will pop up about all sorts of things like what you are cooking for dinner or a project you are working on at work or any number of other things. When you notice that your mind has wandered simply bring your attention back to the music and practice mindfulness. Don't beat yourself up about it, the hardest thing about mindfulness is remembering to be mindful. When your mind is wandering you completely forget about it and live blissfully in your fantasy world. With practice your periods of mindfulness will increase and the clarity of your consciousness with it.

Living Mindfulness. The previous three exercises in mindfulness were concerned with the three main senses of touch, sight and hearing. The principal of mindfulness can be used equally as well with the other two senses. For instance while having a nice meal or enjoying a fine wine. By placing your attention on whatever you are doing, whether it be driving, working, eating or playing golf, your experience will be a lot more clear and vivid. This is mindful living.

Remember that mindfulness is not about trying to make life more enjoyable. And although as a result of it your life might become more enjoyable, mindfulness is more about experiencing what you are experiencing. If you are experiencing discomfort or pain you can be mindful of that too. In fact, when you place your attention on the discomfort you will find that it loses its impact and you will feel more in control."

<http://mindfulnessintroduction.blogspot.com/2005/08/mindfulness-explained.html>