

Mindfulness and mental health

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Mindfulness meditation is the practice of purposefully being aware of and focusing your attention on the present moment. Mindfulness allows you to be in tune with your experience—right now in this moment—and to explore with curiosity whatever sensations, thoughts and emotions are

present without expectations or judgment.

During [meditation](#), you focus your attention and eliminate the stream of jumbled thoughts that may be crowding your mind and causing stress. This focus can result in enhanced physical and emotional well-being.

Many people may think of [mindfulness meditation](#) as "sitting on a pillow, being still, with eyes closed." This may work for some, but there are many ways to practice mindfulness meditation.

Practicing mindfulness involves using breathing methods, guided imagery, and other strategies to relax the body and mind to help reduce stress.

To try focused breathing meditation, sit down, take a deep breath and close your eyes. Focus on your breath as it moves in and out of your body. Sitting and breathing slowly for even just a minute can help.

As you start meditating, try these structured mindfulness exercises:

- **Body scan meditation:** Lie on your back with your legs extended and arms at your sides, palms facing up. Focus your attention slowly and deliberately on each part of your body, in order, from toe to head or head to toe. Be aware of any sensations, emotions or thoughts associated with each part of your body.
- **Sitting meditation:** Sit comfortably with your back straight, feet flat on the floor and hands in your lap. Breathing through your nose, focus on your breath moving in and out of your body. If physical sensations or thoughts interrupt your meditation, note the experience and then return your focus to your breathing.
- **Walking meditation:** Find a quiet place 10- to 20-feet long and walk slowly. Focus on the experience of walking, being aware of

the sensations of standing and the subtle movements that keep your balance. When you reach the end of your path, turn and continue walking, maintaining awareness of your sensations.

Often, mindfulness meditation is recommended as part of a comprehensive treatment for physical and mental health conditions. It's considered a type of mind-body complementary medicine. You can incorporate mindfulness meditation into your busy routine to improve your overall health.

There are many benefits of mindfulness meditation engaging the brain. Think of it as a form of brain exercise. Just as [physical exercise](#) keeps your body healthy, mindfulness meditation keeps your brain fit. Research has shown that just five to 15 minutes of daily meditation is all you need to begin experiencing benefits.

After decades of research into the practice, these benefits have been found to include an increase in:

- Cognitive flexibility
- Diabetes control
- Emotion regulation
- Empathy
- Focus and attention
- Immune system response
- Memory
- Positive emotions
- Positive relationships
- Relaxation
- Self-compassion
- Self-esteem

The [practice](#) also affects many negative physical and mental symptoms,

including decreases in:

- Addictive behaviors
- Anger and hostility
- Anxiety
- Burnout
- Depression
- Emotional reactivity
- Insomnia
- High blood pressure
- Need for pain medications
- Physical pain
- Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms
- Stress

Mindfulness is a supportive strategy to help manage many health issues. It pairs well with other medical treatments and counseling. It's a simple strategy that doesn't require a prescription or special equipment and can be practiced anywhere.

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