

The benefits of 'being in the present'

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(HealthDay)—When you have a full schedule, multitasking might seem like the best way to finish your endless to-do list.

But the brain actually benefits from focusing on one activity at a time.

When you commit to training your attention and exerting control over your mind, you're practicing [mindfulness](#). While it has become a popular psychotherapy technique, mindfulness originated in Buddhism over 2,000 years ago.

The idea of mindfulness is that life should be lived in the [present moment](#). In addition to improving your focus, the practice can bring stress and insomnia relief, and pain reduction.

How?

One explanation comes from a study published in the journal *Psychiatry Research*. The study found that mindfulness can change the concentration of gray matter in areas of the brain involved in learning, memory, regulating emotion and more.

Yoga and tai chi are two mind-body practices that help increase mindfulness along with their physical and relaxation benefits.

There's also [mindfulness meditation](#), a very focused approach developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn. He is creator of the Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

However, you don't need a formal program to incorporate mindfulness into your day. Here are some ideas:

- When you start a task, imagine you're doing it for the first time. Be curious. Feel sensations like you've never experienced them before.

- Focus on your breathing. Take notice as you breathe in and as you breathe out. Follow your breath. It's a reminder that you're alive.
- When you're overcome with emotion, take a step back and trace the emotion's origin and duration. Mindfulness teaches recognition that emotions are fleeting, which helps to reduce fear and anxiety.
- Embrace imperfection. Once you understand that the world is filled with it, it becomes less upsetting.
- Always try to immerse yourself in your surroundings; this helps you be present and connect with the world around you.

More information: The U.S. National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health has more on the positive brain changes from [mindfulness](#) and on meditation itself.

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