

Mindfulness Tips

Mindfulness helps us to slow down and really experience life. Here are six actions anyone can take to improve their mindfulness in everyday life:

1. Be present in your everyday activities.

Going for a walk? Take your earbuds out and listen to what you hear – birds in nature, the sound of the wind. Pay attention to how your senses are engaged. Literally stop and smell the flowers, pick a blade of grass and feel it between your fingers.

2. Experience the food you eat.

The next time you eat something, really pay attention to the experience of eating. Imagine describing the taste to another person who has never tried it. Is it sweet? Salty? What is the texture? Do you have memories associated with the food? Do you remember the experience the first time you ate it?

3. Engage with the people around you.

Pay attention to the words they are choosing when they talk. This is about more than verbal communication. Really notice the people with whom you are engaging. Give them your full attention. Look into their eyes. Let them look into yours.

4. Pay attention to your ‘internal judge’.

We all have an internal voice that at times can be a source of self-criticism. I like to imagine one’s internal judge to be a little mouse that speaks up when you are feeling self-critical. When you notice that mouse whispering things like “I am not strong enough”, imagine yourself placing it into a soundproof glass jar. You can see the mouse squeaking its criticism, but can no longer hear it. Similarly, you can be mindful of those thoughts – noticing them, and recognising how frequently you have them – without acting on them or allowing them to be a part of how you evaluate yourself.

5. Notice your distracting thoughts and ‘let them float’. One of the challenging things about practising mindfulness are the many thoughts that distract us on a daily basis: things we have to do that day, for example. When you are trying to be mindful of your immediate experience and a distracting thought occurs, try imagining your thought as a helium balloon – notice it, then let it float by without spending any time on it.

6. Focus on your breathing.

Most of us breathe without thinking about it. Spend some time watching your normal breathing patterns. Do you breathe quickly? In a shallow way (not taking deep breaths)? Take a few deep breaths and imagine blowing all the air out of your lungs until they are empty. Follow that with a deeper inhale. You will notice that deep breathing is one way we can slow down our heart rate when life feels like it’s moving too quickly or when we feel stressed.

Try out these tips, and see if they can help you focus more fully on the present moment. It’s a great way to ward off feelings of anxiety, leave yourself more open to positive experiences, and better able to handle whatever your day may throw at you.