**Practicing Mindfulness**



Mindfulness means being in the present and using all of your senses. The following exercises will help you start becoming more mindful. Practice them often until they become habit. If it helps, use a journal to document everything so you can refer back it and compare as time goes on.

Mindful Body

When learning to be more mindful of your body, you will need to establish a starting point. This can be done by scanning through each part of the body from head to toes, taking note of the sensations you feel. You can do this anytime, anywhere. Here's how…

Tune out surrounding sounds and focus on your feet. What sensations do you feel? Do they feel warm or cool? Do you feel a breeze blowing over them? Do you feel the texture of your socks pressing against them? Do you feel pain or tightness anywhere?

Once you've completed a scan of your feet, move on to your calves, then knees, thighs, pelvis and on up your body. Once you've scanned your head, slowly work your way back down to your feet.

If you do this at different times of the day, you'll soon discover which areas of your body are stronger than others. You'll become aware of your postural habits. You'll also become more in tune with your aches, pains, cravings and any patterns associated with them.

Mindful Meditation

Mindful meditation includes the body, breath and thoughts. It should be practiced in a quiet place away from distractions. Pick a comfortable, stable seat that doesn't wobble and where your feet can touch the ground or sit on a cushion on the floor. Here's how to do it…

Sitting in an upright, but not ridged, position cross your legs, ensuring your hips higher than your knees. Rest your hands on your thighs. You'll let your gaze rest either on the floor or wall about four to six feet in front of you. Don't try to focus on anything, just let your gaze rest there.

Sit in that position a few minutes focusing on your breathing. Feel the sensation of drawing in a breath and releasing it. Your mind will start to wander. When it does, observe the thoughts as if you are outside looking in at what's happening. Take note, then gently bring your thoughts back to your breathing, how your body is feeling and the quietness of the environment.

At times, you may have many thoughts passing through your mind. This is normal but you will want to bring yourself back to focus on your body and breath.

Start with 5 or 10 minutes of meditation, working up to 30 minutes. If you want, you can extend the time further.

Mindful Eating

Just like with the other mindfulness practices, you'll be using your senses when eating. These can be done when preparing and eating foods. Here's how…

Before cooking, pick each food item up. Observe its shape, texture, weight and smell. How does it feel in your hands?

As you eat, put the food in your mouth but don't chew. How does it feel in your mouth? Is the texture different than prior to cooking? Did the taste change? How does it make your mouth feel?

Next, chew the food, observing how it feels to sink your teeth into it. Does it have a different texture on the outside than the inside? Does it cause your mouth to water? What flavors do you sense? Does it have a heat sensation (like eating hot peppers)? Is it hot or cold? How does it spread throughout your mouth?

Continue this as you eat the different items on your plate, playing close attention to all the sensations you feel.

Repeat at every meal as the foods you eat change.

Using Your Senses Anywhere

You can practice mindfulness anywhere you are. Just take a moment to use your five senses to observe your surroundings and your body, both inside and out.

An easy way to do this is to ask yourself these questions.

1. What do I see right now (a reflection, a flower, etc.)?
2. If it's a scene you’ve looked at previously, ask yourself is there anything I missed consciously seeing before (a dead tree, a pattern, etc.)?
3. Starting with my feet and working my way up, what sensations do I feel right now?
4. Closing my eyes, what do I hear?
5. What smells are surrounding me (foods, fresh cut grass, wet dog, etc.)?
6. What do I taste at this moment; lingering or fresh tastes?
7. Where is my mind right now? Is it calm, scattered, worried, etc.?