

Learning to live in the present moment

A self help guide

Do your thoughts overwhelm and confuse you? Do you wish that your mind had an off button? Do you find yourself pushing away uncomfortable feelings? Do you find yourself looking back on memories of the past or racing ahead to thoughts of the future?

If you have answered yes to any of the above questions, then this self help guide aims to help you.

Why is it hard to live in the present?

Most of us identify with our thoughts and allow them to dictate how we feel. We find it hard to face our uncomfortable feelings and nearly all of us wish we had an off switch in our brain that could stop us from over thinking. However, our emotions are a critical source of information that needs to be attended to and understood. There are times when we have to look at our past and confront our fears, as this can be a good way of taking away the power, they have over us. Other times we must look to the future so that we can live with hope and determination that things can be different for us. However, what life has taught us all is that the past has already gone and can't be changed, and the future is yet to arrive and is completely unknown to us? The present moment, this very moment now is the only moment we have.

So how do we learn to live in the present moment?

Mindfulness can help you to live in the moment.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is about focusing on the present moment and observing your experience in a manner that is more sensual (feeling) rather than analytical (thinking). It is the practice of developing a state of awareness that helps us to manage our emotions and tap into the joy and wonder of our lives. Mindfulness aims to shift ones attention away from thinking to simply observing feelings and bodily sensations, with a kind, non-judgemental curiosity. Embracing the art of Mindfulness can give us a greater enjoyment and appreciation of everyday life. It can reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety. It can allow us to accept our emotions. It improves our memory, focus and mental processing speed. During the state of mindfulness, you become aware and notice thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations as they happen. The goal is not to clear your mind or to stop thinking-the goal is to be in tune with your thoughts and feelings. To really listen to what your body is trying to tell you.

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If you are new to Mindfulness the following exercises can be a good place to start.

Mindful waking up

Start the day by waking up and becoming aware of your surroundings. Listen to the sounds, notice what your thoughts are and get in tune with your body. Focus on your breathing and imagine that with each breath you are breathing in new energy for the day.

Mindful routine

Take a simple daily routine such as bathing and bring your attention to the experience. Feel the warm water against your skin and listen to the sounds that the water makes. Savour the smells of the soaps and shampoos and imagine that you are washing away any negativity.

Mindful eating

The next time you reach for a snack stop and think about how you are feeling. Are you trying to self sooth and deal with a stressful situation? Are you bored? Are you being lazy? Sit down and be fully present with this craving. Being aware can often lessen the desire to reach for snacks when a balanced meal is what you need.

Mindful walking

Whilst out walking make a point to practice mindfulness. Start by noticing how your body moves and feels with each step. Is your body relaxed or are you holding tension? Where do you feel the tension in your body? Once you are in your stride and feeling comfortable expand your awareness to your surroundings. What do you see, hear, feel and smell? What thoughts, feelings and sensations come up for you on your walk? Notice the weather, do you feel warm, cold, is the sun warming your face? Being mindful on your walk and noticing what is happening in the present moment can stop you from repetitively going over a thought or problem in your head.

Mindfulness meditation

Find a quiet place to sit where you will not be disturbed. Make sure that your back is supported and keep your feet on the ground. Close your eyes. Bring your attention to your breathing and notice how it enters and leaves your body. Notice how your belly falls and rises with each breath. It could be beneficial to place your hands on your stomach so that you can feel the rise and fall of each breath. Do not worry if your mind starts to wander, notice what thoughts and feelings come up, and then return to your breath. Keep focusing your attention on your breathing and when you feel yourself being distracted return your concentration back to the breath. You are allowing your thoughts to concentrate on your breathing and the sensations it creates in your body. You are choosing to push away thoughts that distract you from the task at hand.

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Top tips for mindfully living in the present

- Spend some time every day to simply sit and be quiet
- Practice breathing meditation
- Enjoy the beauty of nature
- Listen to your unpleasant emotions. Do not run from them but try to be non-judgemental about them. We all have unpleasant emotions; we all have pleasant emotions. It is all about the balance.
- Remember that thoughts are not facts. You do not believe that you are a one eyed spotty green elephant so why do you believe that you are useless, unworthy, unlovable etc.
- Visualise a hot air balloon and imagine that you are putting all your stress and negativity into the balloon. Then watch it gently float away into the distance. Learn to let go.
- Be thankful for every day.