

mindful meditation guide and journal

Date / Time

So far today, have you brought kind awareness to your:

Thoughts?

Heart?

Body?

None of the Above

First off, congratulations on your decision to enhance your personal growth through mindfulness! This is something you are doing for yourself and your well-being so make a commitment to schedule formal times to practice these exercises just as you would other important appointments. It is easy to lose enthusiasm and dedication to a new practice when obstacles arise and daily tasks begin to get in the way so it is important to figure out what is working and what is not so that you can adjust your practice as needed.

Before beginning mindfulness practices, it is important to understand the concept of mindfulness and what the practice of mindfulness can mean for you in your efforts towards personal growth.

Mindfulness practice often embodies eight attitudes. These attitudes contribute to the growth and flourishing of your mind, heart and body so it is important to understand and recognize the defining points of the eight attitudes of mindfulness listed on the next page.

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1. Learner's mind – Seeing things as a visitor in a foreign land, everything is new and curious.
2. Nonjudgmental – Becoming impartial, without any labels of right or wrong or good or bad. Simply allowing things to be.
3. Acknowledgment – Recognizing things as they are.
4. Settled – Being comfortable in the moment and content where you are.
5. Composed – Being equanimous and in control with compassion and insight.
6. Letting be – Letting things be as they are with no need to change them.
7. Self-reliant – Deciding on your own, from your own experiences, what is true or not.
8. Self-compassionate – Loving yourself as you are with no criticism or self-reproach.

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Take a moment to examine these attitudes in regard to your current state of mind. Write down the attitudes you wish to cultivate more of in your mindfulness practice.



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Once you begin to recognize the eight attitudes of mindfulness, it becomes much easier for you to put these attitudes of mindfulness — learner's mind, nonjudgmental, acknowledgment, settled, composed, letting be, self-reliant, and self-compassionate — in your activities and with other people.

Choose a task, such as baking a cake, and practice the attitudes of mindfulness during the task. See the example below:

- Begin the task with a learner's mind, experience the texture of the ingredients as you gather them for preparing your cake.
- Whether you are baking from scratch or from a box, do so without any judgements about yourself, the cake or your cooking ability.
- Acknowledge the fact that you are self-reliant—that by baking this cake you are caring for yourself and others.
- Practice self-compassion by knowing that you are doing your best and do not get discouraged if the cake does not turn out the way you want it to.
- If your mind tries to rush ahead to the next baking step, settle down and realize that you are in the present moment and bring your mind back to the task.
- Watch the cake while it bakes, as the batter rises and forms, and realize you are letting it be, letting the natural course take place and progress without any interference.

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Notice the difference in how your mind and body feel when these attitudes are present as opposed to when they are not. Try to expand this practice into other areas of your daily life and see if it makes a difference in your relationships. Write down any changes you notice as you begin to practice the attitudes of mindfulness in your daily life.



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As you start to notice the difference in how your mind and body feel from practicing the eight attitudes of mindfulness, you will want to begin meditation exercises that help you learn to listen to your mind and body and become more in tune with what your mind and body needs.

There are several body positions that work well for mindfulness practice and help you avoid sleepiness during practice.

- It is a personal preference whether you stand, sit or lie down. If you stand, comfortable shoes will help you avoid the distraction of aching feet. If you sit, you may choose to sit on the floor, on a cushion or blanket or in a chair, or whatever is comfortable for you. If you choose to lie down it is important that you be fully awake to avoid becoming sleepy.
- It is also a personal preference whether you close your eyes or keep them open while you meditate. If you are feeling tired, perhaps it would be best to keep them at least partially opened to avoid becoming sleepy. However, if you choose to meditate with your eyes open, remain focused on the meditation practice and avoid distractions.
- Assume a comfortable position to avoid your body becoming tense or rigid, thereby causing you discomfort. This would be a distraction that could possibly keep you from meditation for very long. On the other hand, you do not want to assume a position that is so comfortable that you end up falling asleep while meditation.

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- If sleepiness is a problem for you during meditation, you may try meditation while standing or keeping your eyes open as mentioned above. Another option would be to take a nap prior to meditation so that you are well rested.

Write down your thoughts about what body position you think will work best for you during meditation exercises and make a checklist of things you may need prior to beginning meditation exercises.

Do you think you would prefer to stand, sit or lie? Do you have a position of comfort in mind to try during meditation? Do you have comfortable shoes if you meditate while standing? Do you need a cushion or blanket if you sit in the floor to meditate? Will you keep your eyes open or closed during meditation? Should you take a nap prior to meditating to avoid becoming sleepy during mindful meditation?

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Once you have decided on a body position that works for you for meditation exercises, you will also want to find a quiet place to meditate where you will be free from distractions and can concentrate solely upon yourself.

In this next meditation exercise, we will discuss is called the mindful check-up

The mindful check-up is an excellent meditation exercise to begin with after familiarization with the eight attitudes of mindfulness because as you begin to realize what your mind and body needs, you will need to develop the skills necessary to cater to these needs. The mindful check-up will promote listening to your mind and body and assist in centering and realigning yourself by helping you to realize how you are feeling emotionally, physically as well as mentally. This can be done throughout the day on a daily basis.

Do this practice in a soothing environment with no distractions, such as a television or phone. It can be done either sitting up or lying down, however, if you lie down and find yourself becoming sleepy, you should try a more upright position. Since the main focus point is the inner workings of your mind and body, you may want to try this with your eyes closed, however, if you prefer you may keep the opened partially. Concentrate solely on this practice for about three minutes.

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- Begin this mindful check-up by delving into your mind and body and simply allowing any emotion, thought or physical sensation to just be. Perhaps this is the first time you have stopped during your busy day to take a break.
- As you come to the state of being rather than doing, you may become aware of thoughts and feelings you have carried throughout the day. These need no analyzation or judgement, only acknowledgement. Just allow yourself to be in the here and now, in the presence of the moment. Simply check in with yourself for about three minutes.

When you have finished the exercise of mindful check-up for the first time, write down any sensations, feelings or thoughts that came to mind during the exercise.

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As you begin to understand the inner workings of your mind and body through the mindful check-up, you will want to expand your meditation efforts to delve deeper into the mind and body connection.

This brings us to the second meditation exercise we will discuss called sitting mindfulness meditation.

Sitting mindfulness meditation begins with mindfulness of breathing then expands to physical sensations, sounds, thoughts and emotions, and finally choiceless awareness. Expanding mindfulness practice with sitting meditation allows you to become more aware of your thoughts and feelings, also bringing more awareness to habitual patterns of behavior that may not be in your best interest. Looking at your behavior with a beginner's mind allows you to explore other possibilities and chose a different approach.

Mindful Breathing

The first step of sitting meditation is usually mindfulness of breathing. The breath is in a constant state of change as you inhale and exhale with breath coming in and going out, just like the ocean tides. You must realize that everything in life changes and you can chose to go with the flow instead of fighting it because the stronger the resistance, the greater the suffering.

Mindful Sensations

The next step after mindful breathing is mindful sensations. Awareness of physical sensations is different from the body scan. Instead of systemically checking the body part by part, you focus on sensations that are prevalent with each moment. Noticing sensations as they come and go throughout the body makes this exercise more insightful of the present moment experience. The body experiences a myriad of sensations (pain, tingling, burning, warmth, coolness, itchiness, dryness and so on) that may be either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. If you don't feel noticeable sensations, you can instead focus on points of contact, such as your back against the chair or your feet touching the floor — anywhere you feel contact. With mindfulness meditation, instead of analyzing the sensations, you simply acknowledge them.

Mindful Hearing

The next step after mindful sensations is mindful hearing. Mindful hearing can be practiced almost anytime and anywhere because sounds are always coming and going in our environment. If a specific sound is continual and possibly even irritating, such as a loud music, crying babies, or car alarms, simply bring attention to the sound itself without analyzing it. On a more basic level, the mind simply hears sound waves. Auditory phenomena are ubiquitous; you cannot escape them. Even if you isolated yourself in a soundproof room, you'd still hear internal sounds of your heartbeat, your pulse, or ringing in the ears. Whatever you hear in your environment, try not to judge the sounds as good or bad. Simply notice how sounds come and go as transient events.

Mindful Thoughts and Emotions

The next step after mindful hearing is mindful thoughts and emotions. Focus your attention to the mind and the thought process itself. Thoughts and emotions are always changing, just like the breath, sensations and sounds. Rather than getting engrossed in the contents of the mind, just experience the thought process. As you become aware of the stories you spin and the snares you create, you can begin to disengage from them.

Choiceless Awareness

The last step of this exercise is choiceless awareness, where the present moment becomes your focus goal. Choiceless awareness is being mindful of whatever happens during each moment in the continual progression of present moments—whatever arises in the mind and body, whether a sensory phenomenon or thoughts and emotions. On the surface you may be very still, while internally you are watching an influx of physical and mental experience.

Working together, your mind and body interact through constantly changing mental and physical stimuli such as thoughts, emotions, physical sensations, sights, sounds, smells, and tastes. With choiceless awareness, observe what is presently forefront in the mind and body. If nothing is especially dominant to draw your focus, remember you can always go back to the breath – or sensations, sounds, or thoughts and emotions to anchor yourself to the present moment.

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Now that you understand the steps involved in the process of sitting mindfulness meditation, find a quiet spot free from distractions and then sit in a comfortable position that will allow you to remain alert and then focus your concentration on this exercise.

- As you bring yourself into the present moment, check the mind and body for things you have carried throughout the day – perhaps things that have been going on recently or thoughts from the events of the day.
- Whatever the thoughts and feelings are, simply acknowledge them and allow them to be, without any analysis or judgement.
- Bring awareness to your breathing. Just breathe naturally and normally, without trying to control it; being mindful of the breath rising and falling as you inhale and exhale. As you breathe in focus on breathing in, and then as you breathe out, focus on breathing out. Simply concentrate on the breath, breathing in and breathing out.
- Now gently shift your focus from the breath and bring it to sensations in the body. Observe and acknowledge the myriad of sensations flowing through the body as they change with each moment.
- If you find areas of tightness and tension with your body check try to allow them to soften and relax.

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- If you are not able to soften and relax, acknowledge the sensations and allow them to flow wherever they need to go and do whatever they need to do.
- Now draw attention to hearing, observing all sounds without ambivalence. Break the sounds down to basic sound waves that can be heard with the body. Acknowledge the multitude of varying sounds, internal and external, moment to moment.
- Notice how the sounds change with each moment, whether internal or external, the sounds rise and fall. Hear them appear and disappear, just sounds.
- Now gently shut out the sounds in the mind and shift focus to emotions and thoughts. Observe the mind without judgement; simply acknowledge the myriad of mental formations with each moment. Like lying in a field and watching the clouds move and change shape as they float by, watch the mind in the same manner.
- Notice how thoughts rise and form in the mind then recede when another thought takes over. The mind is constantly thinking about this and that, functioning with a mind of its own, analyzing, planning, remembering, comparing, etc. Experience how these thoughts appear and disappear as just thoughts.

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- Try to avoid the pitfalls of mind snares and negative habits as you observe and experience your thoughts and emotions. Try to just observe and let them be, knowing they will appear, disappear and recede in time. If you do get caught up in thoughts and feelings, that is okay, this is simply a way of returning to the present moment. Once you realize you are lost in thought, in that very moment you are no longer lost. Simply refocus on mind observation with the clouds of thoughts and emotions floating on and on.
- If you become frustrated with wandering mind, perhaps a short time of mindful breathing would help you center yourself again.
- Once you are again centered, withdraw awareness from mental events and focus on the present moment itself as your primary goal.
- Choiceless awareness invites you to become mindful of whatever arises with each moment, in the mind and body, whether a stream of emotions or thoughts, sensations, sounds or other sensory experiences. Just sit back and absorb the internal experience as your body and mind combine and interact with constantly changing stimuli.
- Simply observe what is prevalent in the mind and body and be present to it. If nothing predominates and you are unfocused, go back to another object or focus on breathing to anchor yourself in the present moment. Sometimes there are thoughts and emotions or sensations and sounds but if nothing is occurring, you are always breathing and that can be your anchor in the sea of change in your body and mind.

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- As you learn to give space to whatever is arising inside without judgement, you can begin to go with the flow. Then instead of fighting it, you will begin to acknowledge and understand that all things change. Even feelings of anger, sadness, pain, anxiety and confusion will diminish if you give these feelings space.
- Now withdraw focus from choiceless awareness and come back to the breath, feel the entire body rise up on inhalation and fall down on exhalation.

When doing this exercise for the first time, take some time to write about whatever came up for you emotionally, physically and mentally.

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Write down what did and did not work well for you during your first meditation exercise and things you may wish to do differently in the future.



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Remember, mindfulness practice is something you are doing for yourself and your well-being. It is important to maintain enthusiasm and dedication to a new practice when obstacles arise and daily tasks begin to get in the way so it is important to figure out what is working and what is not so that you can adjust your practice as needed.

Write down any obstacles or tasks that interfered with your mindful meditation exercises. Write down any suggestions to avoid the interference in the future so you can continue to practice these exercises just as you would other important appointments.

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Now that you have begun a new journey to enhance your personal growth and self-awareness through mindfulness write down any differences you may have already noticed since beginning your journey.

What do you hope to accomplish through mindfulness practices?

Do you see yourself making lifestyle changes to incorporate mindfulness practices in your daily life and do you feel this is something you will be able to commit to?

Congratulations once again for your decision! May this experience be as rewarding as your learner's mind can imagine.

thank you for your mindfulness practice

May I continue to look deeply into
my mind, heart and body.

May I see things and meet things

AS THEY ARE

and may this clear and sustained knowing free me

**FOR THE SAKE OF
ALL BEINGS.**



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