

Tips to improve mindfulness

What is mindfulness?

How much of your day do you spend in the here and now? Do you find yourself beginning to mentally work on the day's tasks as you shower in the morning? The modern lifestyle encourages us to do many things at once and to constantly think several steps ahead. This can be necessary and helpful during the course of the day, but it can also lead to stress and dissatisfaction. In contrast, mindfulness is a special form of attention control that is non-judgmental and takes place in the here and now (Prof. Jon Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Mindfulness is good for...

A mindful attitude can allow to focus more intensely on the current moment, slow down automatic actions and processes, be more conscious of your own state of mind, and react better to your own needs. Are large numbers of different and difficult challenges causing you stress in your studies? Mindfulness can help you to notice and process your stress better by reacting to symptoms early. Using mindfulness strategies, you can reduce stress in your life and improve your wellbeing.

Mindfulness Exercises

You can use mindfulness in nearly any situation. The underlying principle is the redirection of attention to what is happening in the current moment (e.g., what you are seeing, hearing, or feeling), and the conscious and non-judgmental description of your observations; you should try to maintain the interested but removed attitude of an observer. It is normal to lose focus now and again when doing these exercises. When you notice your attention wandering, simply return yourself gently to the current moment. Mindfulness lies in the conscious return of your attention! It is particularly fascinating to practice mindfulness during unpleasant activities and see how your experience of the activity changes.

Walking mindfully: Pick a route, the way to school for example, and spend a minute of it focusing on what you see, hear, smell, and feel. Do not evaluate these experiences; simply describe them in your mind. Every time your attention wanders, bring it back to your senses.

Doing the dishes mindfully: Take the sponge or brush in your hand and focus on the way it feels against your palm. Notice the smell of the dish soap. Begin washing the dishes while continuing to notice as much as you can. Listen to the sound of the water and watch how the foam forms in the sink. What movements are you making? Concentrate entirely on the moment.

Studying mindfully for tests: Before you begin studying, spend a few minutes noticing and observing your current physical and mental state and that of your work area. Pay attention to your perceptions and describe them to yourself without positive or negative judgment. How do your shoulders feel? Your head? Are you hot or cold? Are you relaxed, tired, or restless? Bring your attention back gently when you feel it wandering. Observe your study area. What materials do you have? Do not change anything right now, just try to describe them precisely. When you need a break from studying, consider spending a few minutes repeating these steps.