

# LIVING WITH MINDFULNESS

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*An aid to relaxing and gaining control.*

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**REACTIONS TO STRESS** can have a negative effect on health. It can lead to high blood pressure, a rapid resting pulse rate and can cause heart rhythm disturbances. Reactions to stress can weaken the immune system which then leads to a variety of illnesses. It is important to learn how to handle stress.

Mindfulness Meditation has been shown to help a person manage stressful situations by increasing one's awareness and by making the mind more receptive to one's current situation and internal states. It is a method of fully embracing with minimal resistance one's current life situation and internal states.

One can bring about increased awareness to any activity. Here are some examples:

## **Being Mindful of Emotions**

With Mindfulness Meditation, one can learn to be less judgmental. Being less judgmental helps to bring about a more relaxed state. One can learn to watch anger and other emotional states with compassion. This enables one to eventually let go of these states or, at least, keep from intensifying them.

## **Being Mindful of Eating**

Increasing one's awareness of eating may benefit those who are trying to make changes in their eating habits. Here is how to increase your awareness of eating--

1. Look at the food you are about to eat. Focus on what it consists of. Ask yourself, "Do I still want to take this food into my body?"
2. Pay close attention to every bite. Food eaten mindfully will be easier to digest and you will be less likely to overeat.
3. Just after eating, notice how the food you ate affects your digestive system. Does it agree with you? Notice how you feel when eating a low fat meal versus and a high fat meal...a candy bar snack versus a raw vegetable snack.

## **Mindful Stretching Exercises**

Gentle stretching and strengthening exercises done very slowly with moment to moment awareness of breathing and of the sensations that arise is *yoga*. Yoga seeks to unite the body, mind and spirit. This can result in improved health and vitality.

## **Mindful Breathing and Sitting as a Meditation**

Mindful breathing and sitting (meditation) helps to relax and focus the mind. Just 5 minutes a day can make you feel more refreshed and energetic. Here are some guidelines for practicing mindful breathing and sitting:

1. Make a special time and place for "non-doing".
2. Adopt an alert and relaxed body posture.
3. Look dispassionately at the reactions and habits of your mind.
4. Bring your attention to your breathing by counting silently "1" on inhalation and "2" on exhalation, "3" on inhalation, etc. When you reach number "10", return to number "1". (If you go beyond the number 10, then you know your mind has wandered).
5. When your mind wanders, name what it wanders to and come back to the breathing.
6. Once you have practiced focusing on your breathing, you can use sensation, sound or watching thoughts as your point of concentration.

You cannot prevent stressful situations in life but you can control your reactions to them. Learning and practicing being mindful can help.



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