



Essential Mindfulness Strategies

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What is Mindfulness?

The clinical definition of Mindfulness is “paying attention to something, in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally.” ~ Jon Kabat-Zinn, 2003.

“Paying attention” in this sense means paying attention to certain things you are surrounded with at or in the present place and time.

“On Purpose” means you intentionally decide to pay attention to something specific.

“In the Present Moment” means you focus on the here and now and get rid of any thoughts from the past or future.

Being “non-judgmental” means you are not going to compare, judge or be critical of yourself or what arises while paying attention.

As you make your way through this workbook, you will develop your own sense and personal understanding of what Mindfulness means to you.

Some people believe that Mindfulness is completely about meditation and that can be a huge deterrent especially if you are someone who has a hard time sitting still for any length of time. More so, Mindfulness is about dismissing your distracting thoughts and learning how to incorporate meditation as a tool to assist you while practicing your Mindfulness.

In this eBook, we are going to be looking at tools to help you with:

- Specific Mindfulness Actions
- Mindfulness Skills for Specific Mental Health Disorders
- Simple Questions, Thoughts and Exercises
- Journaling your Mindfulness journey

This book will attempt to improve your mindfulness skills to improve your mental, physical, and spiritual health and keep you grounded in the present.

With regular practice, you won't find yourself letting your thoughts wander and you won't get distracted by or caught up in the past or future negative thoughts.



Mindfulness Actions

One: Where do I begin?

Since Mindfulness is something that you can start at any time, it is just a matter of finding time or making sure that you consciously think about incorporating it into your daily routine.

This book will give you Basic ideas but is not intended to be an official reference guide. You have to remember that you are walking around with so many thoughts swirling around in your head at any given moment in time that you can feel as if you are unfocused, in a fog, overwhelmed and your mind never having a chance to truly rest. Mindfulness will help to unclutter and clear your mind, calm your brain and allow it to settle down for a spell.

Have you ever picked up a snow globe and shook the snow until the entire globe becomes so filled that you can barely see the object inside? That is what is going on inside your mind. Once you start practicing Mindfulness, it will be as if the snow has settled at the bottom of the globe and you can think and see more clearly.

To get you started practicing Mindfulness, completely use these simple exercises to get a jumpstart and overall feel for what Mindfulness is and how it can help you:

- Choose something to focus your attention on
- How will you focus: using your visual, auditory, or tactile senses
- Focus “on purpose”
- How are you going to stay focused in the present moment?
- How does it feel not to be “judgmental?”
- Write what your definition of Mindfulness means to you

Let's break each of these down to discuss the technique for each step.

Choose something to focus your attention on. By focusing your attention you are choosing a goal you wish to achieve by using Mindfulness. Are you taking a walk? Are you focusing on each step you take? Are you a runner? Are listening to each breath you take? In doing tasks such as these, you are focusing your attention on that task and that task alone. You don't let your mind wander but instead return your attention to the task over and over again.

How will you focus: using your visual, auditory, or tactile senses? You can use Mindfulness in all areas of your life and surroundings. We pass up so many beautiful moments by listening to all the noise inside our head and not fully appreciating the beauty of any given moment. Before you start, decide what your intention is. Use your eyes to observe the color of the sky, water, buildings, etc. Notice everything about the sky, the clouds, etc. Listen intently to trains in the distance or jets overhead. Are they carrying passengers to a far off destination with family and/or friends? What do those sounds mean to you? Are you making something with your hands? Are you feeling every brushstroke, every knit stitch, etc.? What do you hope to accomplish?

Focus “On Purpose.” By focusing intently you are making sure that you don’t let your mind wander. That is why it is important to identify your intent before you begin. Notice what is happening the moment and acknowledging, but letting go, any distractions. Try to remain aware without changing anything. Observe and take in any and all observations. When you become aware, you can eventually change unwanted patterns.

How are you going to stay focused in the present moment? The world we live in is filled with distractions. We have computers, tablets, iPads, cell phones which are all meant to create and fill our lives with noise. We are so distracted these days that we aren’t even aware of how much the “noise” has taken over our lives. When you practice mindfulness, you are getting rid of the noise. You are paying attention to your thoughts, your feelings, your physical body sensations and surroundings. It will be hard for some people to let go of these distractions but once you do, you will wonder why you didn’t set these items aside for longer periods of time.

How does it feel not be judgmental? Without distractions, we can allow ourselves to set our intention to pay attention. When you allow yourself to focus on one thing, you notice everything about the moment and the object of your intention. You will be in a state where you become non-judgmental. Your mind is not cluttered and you are open to feeling sensations that you might not have felt in a while. You are not being distracted by other thoughts, feelings or physical limitations.

Write what your definition of Mindfulness means to you. After you practice Mindfulness, write down what happened. What does it mean to you? What did you notice? You don’t have to start practicing Mindfulness for an hour a day. Start out slow. Gradually build up your Mindfulness practice a little at a time. Write down your observations each time so you can look back and reflect on where you began and where you are now.

Two: Basics of Mindfulness

When you begin practicing Mindfulness, know that you are not doing a total “brain dump” but directing yourself to focus your attention on a chosen target. By focusing on a target, you can bring yourself back into focus whenever your mind wanders.

No one is perfect and with all the thoughts that our brain produces each day, it is normal to have moments where you can't help but have your mind leave the present.

The goal is to keep your focus and only notice the distractions and your emotions as they creep their way into your Mindfulness session. Make note of any stray thoughts or emotions that arose during your session. Were there any physical sensations you might have felt?

Because there is no way to completely shut down other thoughts processing in your head, your mind will wander from time to time. If you do find this happening, take a moment to stop your Mindfulness and make a note of the thought but let it go. After you release the thought, return your mind to your intended target.

Make note of what happened when to you during your Mindfulness session. Were you able to stay focused without many distractions? Were you able to overcome the urge to stop your Mindfulness and go back to concentrating? Were you able to let it go? How did the overall session feel and what did you get from it?

The intent of practicing Mindfulness is to become more and more focused and to overcome obstacles, explore your feelings and help you to take the time to look within yourself.

Are you already being mindful? Are you taking the time necessary to practice intently? Mindfulness takes daily practice. Are you finding excuses not to carve out a few moments of time in your day? What can you do to change that?

Everyone can come up with excuses but it is the person who truly wants to benefit from Mindfulness who will find the time.

Journaling your experience will allow you to look back and see how far you have come. Look at your objections to see how silly they really were. Did you practice even though you might have had objections? List three to five benefits you found using Mindfulness. By keeping a journal, it will keep you on task.

Three: Mindfulness at Home

Choosing how and when you are going to practice Mindfulness is just as important as the actual session itself. A lot of people prefer to do this at home because they can carve out a little corner in their house specifically for practicing.

Again, Mindfulness can be done at any time or any place. Choosing your specific place is entirely up to you. The place you choose where be where you most likely feel the least distracted.

When you practice, you might want to use the same position all the time to allow for continuity. There are several you can choose from so let's cover a few here:

During Activities: Even though you are busy during the day (be it at home or work) stop during the day, breathe and notice your surroundings. You can basically be doing anything as long as you take the time to genuinely stop and become mindful.

Walking: If you are on a walk, notice everything around you. Notice the birds, the clouds, the trees, the children playing in the park, the colors of buildings or houses, animals. Walk so that your arms are swaying back and forth freely (front to back), you are walking tall, eyes looking all around and your body is relaxed.

Sitting: Sit in a chair with your back straight (if you are able) keep your hands sitting on your legs with your palms up and your feet flat on the floor.

Lying down: Lay flat on the floor and don't cross your legs or your arms. Allow your hands to fall beside you, again, with your palms up. For comfort, you can put a pillow under your head or knees.

Yoga Position: Sit with your legs crossed and your hands resting gently on your knees. This is similar to the pose used in yoga and other forms of meditation.

Finding time to practice Mindfulness is probably something you think you don't have time for in your busy, hectic day. It only takes 10-15 minutes at the same time every day. Try to do it first thing in the morning, mid-day or before you go to bed. And, don't forget to journal about your entire Mindfulness session in order to keep track of your thoughts, feelings and actions during your session.

Four: Mindful Intuitions

If you truly want to practice Mindfulness and incorporate it into your daily routine, you have to be willing to become “in tune” to your intuitions and inner wisdom. You already experience being in tune when you get the butterflies in your stomach or the “gut” instincts you feel from time to time.

So how can we become even more in tune with our body and mind using Mindfulness? Just know that your intuition is something that feeds you information on a regular basis throughout the day and all throughout your life.

What is intuition? Intuition seems to defy logic or any normal process of reasoning or previous knowledge. You usually have feelings of intuition in a moment’s notice. Intuitions come to us in all forms: feelings, warnings or danger, a dream.

In order to deal with these intuitions, you have to make a conscious decision to focus on them when they happen. Clear your mind and try to answer the questions your mind is coming up with. Look for signs. Meditate on it to get a clearer understanding.

Mindful Intuition means practicing meditations that help you connect with your inner wisdom and/or intuition. Relax your body before you begin your Mindfulness session. Completely focus on every inch of your body while at the same time relaxing each part. Start at your head and go all the way to your toes.

After you relax each part, allow yourself to be taken on a journey. Where are you going? Where do you want to allow yourself to be taken? Relax. Focus on whatever is taking place in this calm, quiet place.

Stop and observe a moment of silence. Think about your Mindful intuition.

Journal about your Mindful Intentions. Were you able to relax? What did you do to stay focused? What smells, sounds, colors, memories, thoughts, feelings, mental pictures or body sensations did you discover?

Has intuition been a large part of your life? Have you always followed your instincts/ intuition. What are some times when you wish you had or hadn’t allowed your intuition to take over?

How do your intuitions come to you? Thoughts? Dreams? Journal about anything you can remember that has to do with this session.

Five: Mindful Intentions

Using Mindful Intention means that you are going to discover a structured way to define and support any intention you may have.

The first thing you need to do is set an intention. By doing this, you are deciding what you want to focus your attention on. This will assist you in staying focused on specific tasks or goals.

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, setting an intention is what you must first do every time you practice Mindfulness. By doing this, you are defining what your intention is and clarifying in your mind why you chose it and what you hope to gain when you achieve it.

Discover your true intentions by asking yourself a series of questions such as: What do I want to learn when I practice Mindfulness? By using Mindfulness it will allow me to do what in my life? How do I feel when I practice Mindful Intent?

If you are having a hard time answering questions such as those listed above, try using meditation in conjunction with practicing Mindfulness Intentions. Visualizing and imagining are great ways to allow us to practice what we want to improve upon our ability to accomplish anything in our life.

Practice Mindful Intentions by purposefully setting your intentions throughout your day. Start out the day with calm breathing. Pay attention to all the little things you are doing to get ready for the day. Stay fully present in each moment.

As you go through the day, notice all your surroundings, the noises, the colors, smells and how your body feels. You are intent on staying focused on each moment and even if your mind wanders, you will bring yourself back to the present moment.

No matter if you are at work, exercising, or driving home from work, fully focus on each moment of the day. By doing this, you will feel calmer and more grounded and feel as if you have accomplished and discovered so much about yourself and your surroundings.

Journaling your Mindful Intentions. Were you surprised by your thoughts or emotions? Were you able to clarify your intention? Are you going to use this intention if you get side-tracked and need to get back on track? What is getting in your way of following through with your meditation or intentions?

Six: Emotions

Emotions are oftentimes accompanied by a story and thoughts. When you allow yourself to be pulled into the emotions, you can lose your Mindfulness thoughts because often these thoughts bring with them stories from your past or things you think will happen in the future.

By being Mindful, you are keeping yourself grounded in the present and not allowing yourself to be dragged into emotions that have no bearing on your present story.

You can be aware or mindful of your emotions and identify it without being judgmental, and examine it in the present moment of the feeling without getting pulled into the past or the future.

Mindfulness allows you to let go of thoughts and emotions. But, you can also tune into an emotion if it happens to arise. Notice everything about the emotion and where it began. Was it in your mind? Did it show up somewhere else in your body first?

Some emotions start out small and then gradually grow throughout time. How are you breathing when you first notice this emotion? What is your body doing? How are you feeling emotionally?

Does the emotion feel good or bad? Notice if the intensity changes over time. Have you ever felt this emotion before? Allow and accept the emotion instead of judging it. Remind yourself that you are not your emotion. Do you or have you held on to this emotion before? Can you replace this negative emotion with a positive one?

Did you know that there is a computer program that actually allows you to see your heart rate as you imagine feelings of appreciation, gratitude, love and/or caring?

If you focus your attention on the heart, what did it feel like to focus on the heart area?

Did you notice any changes in your breathing or other physical sensations? Did you know that practicing Mindfulness Emotions increases emotional self-regulation and resiliency?

Journaling your Mindfulness Emotions. What are the feelings you have? Where does the emotion start in your body? Were you able to distinguish present versus the past or future? Did you focus on your emotions as an observer? Did you name the emotion? What thought(s) triggered the emotion? What was the story behind the feeling?

Seven: Thoughts

As mentioned earlier, we all have thousands upon thousands of thoughts that enter our mind each day. It is what you do with those thoughts after you notice one creeping in.

In order to dismiss the thought you need to observe it, accept it and then let it go by choosing not to deal with it at the present time if it happens to be a distraction.

As an analogy, if you were sitting at home and watching a TV show that didn't particularly interest you, wouldn't you push the remote to change the channel?

So it is with your thoughts as well. You can deliberately choose what you want and don't want to think about. If you are sad, angry, or worried you can change the channel so you don't have to watch or participate with what is going on.

If you change the channel on a TV from heavy metal rock to a music channel that plays soothing music, what do you think this is going to do to your mood? Of course, you are going to feel more pleasant and calm.

Whatever you are thinking about is what affects your feelings and behavior. We can choose to ignore bad thoughts and only think about thoughts that make us feel good or better.

There are times when you just can't help it that the negative thoughts do get in and what you choose to do with them will say a lot about your emotions. If someone has anxiety, depression or ADHD, they are focusing on and internalizing negative thoughts which originate from false core beliefs.

In order for you to get rid of these negative thoughts, you need to identify them and then get rid of them by replacing the negative with more positive reality-based thoughts. Do you have a pattern of negative thinking? Do you believe that you need to replace those negative thoughts and how are you going to go about doing that?

Journaling your Mindful Thoughts. Did your thoughts have a theme to them? Did you engage in an inner dialogue to allow yourself the ability to erase the thought? Talk about how you know it is normal to have these thoughts and that you are not going to allow them any control and you are not going to engage with them while you are practicing Mindfulness.

Eight: Breathing

Learning how to breathe and paying attention to your breathing are important skills in learning Mindfulness. When you change your breathing patterns you change your physiology.

Just by breathing in and out you are triggering parts of your nervous system that you probably weren't even aware of. Some parts that are involved are your heart rate, your sweat glands, your digestive system and your intestine and glands.

In order to allow yourself to feel more calm and less anxious, you need to practice breathing techniques which will lower your stress response and improve your emotional and cognitive health.

By simply breathing in your nose and out your mouth you are calming your physiology and stress responses. You can do this mindfully before you answer the phone, before you eat something, or if you are feeling stressed.

You can also do diaphragm breathing which involves taking in so much air into the lungs that it expands the stomach. When you practice a chest breath it is simulating anxious breathing. When you take in air and allow it to fill your diaphragm it is considered relaxation breathing and provides more oxygen to the body to help lower the stress response.

In order to breathe through your diaphragm properly, place a hand above your belly button and one hand on your chest. Next relax your abdomen and breathe in through your nose and fill your lungs allowing them to expand downward. Do not breathe shallow breaths and do not raise your shoulders. Exhale slowly through your slightly opened mouth. You will know if you are doing this correctly by the warmth or coldness of the breath. If you are breathing from your abdomen, the air will feel warmer whereas if you are breathing from your chest, the air will feel colder.

Pay attention to your breathing in great detail and it will help you to practice the process of noticing when your mind begins to wander and can help bring your mind/attention back.

If you journal about your breathing, keep track of what happened. What thoughts or feelings surfaced? Did you notice if your mind started wandering? What did you like or dislike about paying attention to your breathing? What other thoughts did you have?

Nine: Physical Body

If you have heard anything about Mindfulness before you picked up this book, you have probably read about the MSBR (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Program) by Jon Kabat-Zinn and how body scan meditation is included in that program.

The body scan meditation is usually included in studies on the effectiveness of mindfulness. The meditation involves focusing your full attention on each part of your body and noticing whatever sensations arise.

You then accept the sensation and then send kind and compassionate thought to each area of the body where the sensation arose. By doing this, it allows you to enter deep states of relaxation, work with feelings of discomfort and pain, and increase your power of concentration and mindfulness.

The body scan, in simple terms, asks you to breathe in slowly (just as most of the other mindful breathing exercises) and feel every part of your body. Take mental notes as you breathe in and out to discover each area from your head to your toes.

By doing the scan, you are once again putting your body into a relaxed state. This doesn't take a lot of time but you have to be willing to put your whole heart and mind into the exercise to feel total relaxation.

Another method is called Progressive Muscle Relaxation. This exercise involves tensing your muscle first and then releasing it. This will also provide a deep state of relaxation.

If you want a total state of wellness, you might want to try Remembered Wellness. This exercise will allow your whole body and mind to recover back to a state of wholeness and completeness, order, balance, harmony and flow. This involves remembering a time when you felt well and reimagining what that used to feel like.

Journaling your Physical Body Mindfulness. What were you thinking during the meditations/exercises? Did you become more relaxed or more agitated? Did you accept what was happening? Were there any emotions that arose when you focused on certain areas of your body? If you had experienced trauma to a certain part of your body, did this help to remember deep buried feelings? Did any particular emotions come to the surface when you paid attention to your body?

Ten: Relationships

Relationships are the lifeblood of human societies. The first thought might be intimate relationships but you are a part of several types of relationships in your life at any given moment. We have our spouse/partner/significant other, of course, but we also have family relationships with mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters.

We have friends that we have a different type of relationship we cultivate. If you are in an office or business setting, you probably have lots of co-workers, bosses, etc. whom you interact with on a daily basis. These are all different forms of relationships.

With so many different relationships, how are you supposed to juggle each and every one of them? It is hard to pay attention when there are so many other distractions occurring in your world.

You can get so caught up in all the other demands in your life that you do not focus your complete and undivided attention to those whom you are closest to in your life.

Try to be present when you are interacting with the person in the relationship you are trying to mend or make better. What are you thinking? What does this person need from you right now? Put yourself in the other person's shoes to see what they see and might think about you.

Were your expectations met in this relationship? Are you accepting of the person or did you expect change? Were you demanding? Are you being positive and clear about your intentions? Did you treat them with compassion? Are you taking care of yourself so you can put your best foot forward in the relationship?

Try Mindful listening when you speak with the other person. There is nothing like feeling like you are being understood. In order for you to make someone feel that way, you have to be totally willing to stop everything else and really listen to the other person. Focus your full attention and don't let your mind wander off. Do you think they felt understood and appreciated?

Journal about the last time you "felt" like this. What did you notice as far as emotions while you were practicing Mindfulness in a relationship? Did you stay focused on this person and this person only? Were you thinking about someone living or someone who has passed? What did you feel? Did you have feelings of sadness, loss, or regret?

Conclusion

This Mindfulness Workbook is provided so that you can get a feel for what Mindfulness can do for you within a variety of actions.

All of the actions mentioned in the book could take volumes of words to dissect each one individually and delve into them fully. What is attempted within this book is to bring awareness and to touch on just the basics. Please keep that in mind as you read through the pages.

In order to fully understand and/or go into depth on any issue brought up here, do your homework and research your particular issue. Between your local public library and with the internet at your fingertips, you can delve much further into each subject.

Ask your doctor or physician about using Mindfulness to help heal yourself along with any prescribed solutions they may ask you to try.

Mindfulness techniques when used properly can help greatly help in many of the situations mentioned in this book. We acknowledge that there are times when a professional is needed and that is ok.

What we are attempting to do here is to give you alternatives to try before, during or after other forms of treatment which may or may not be working.

Mindfulness can help quiet your mind and body and get you to a peaceful state every day if you take the time to set aside a specific space for yourself. With Mindfulness, don't try to start out by going full throttle into these methods. Mindfulness takes practice and with practice comes the serenity and peacefulness you are seeking.

When you are in touch with your mind and body, and know how to control them in order to avoid some of the situations we mention here, you will find yourself living in a much more peaceful state!