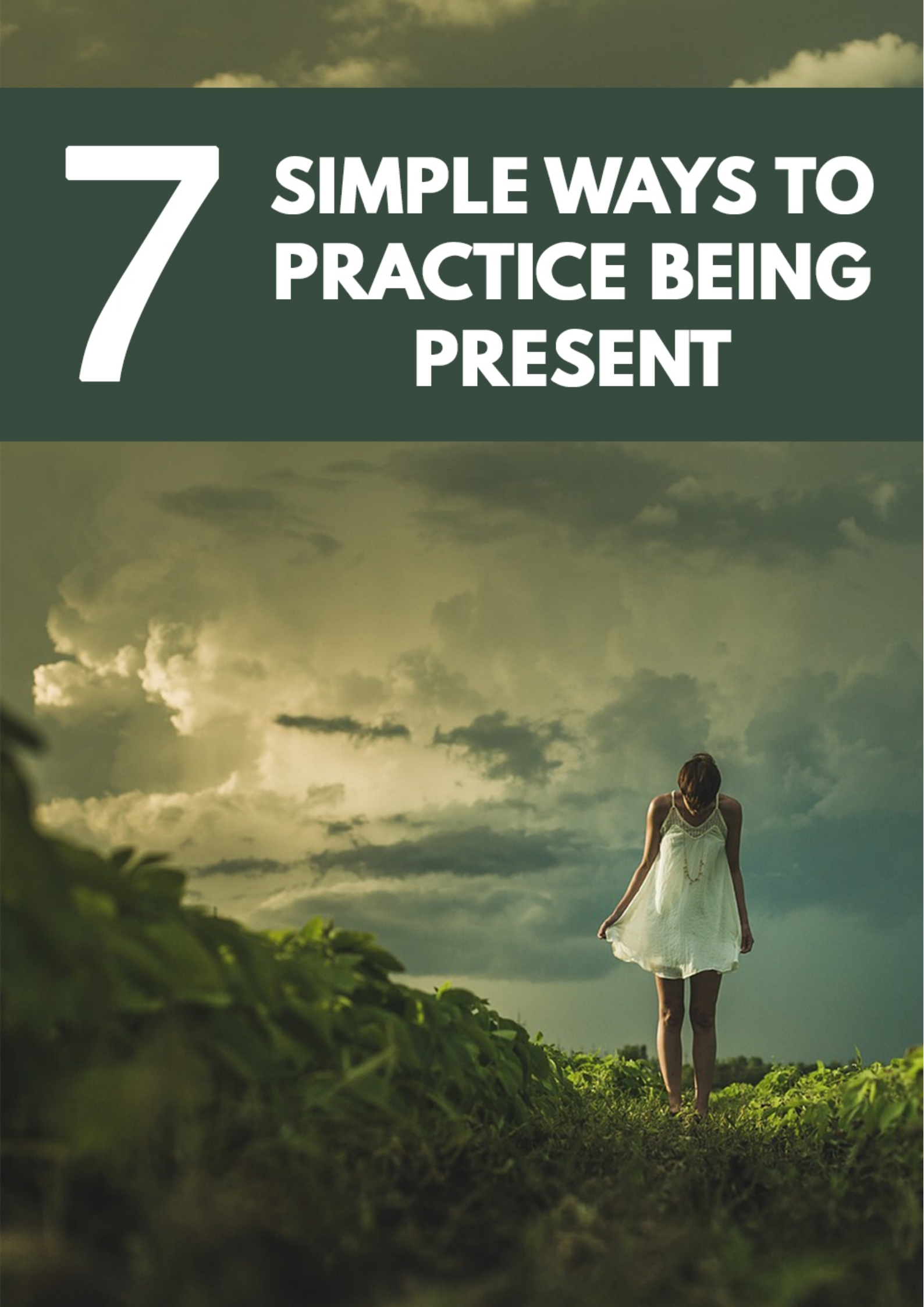
7 SIMPLE WAYS TO PRACTICE BEING PRESENT



Introduction

The amount of time most people spend not being present is massive. More than that, it's a massive amount of unproductive, useless, wasted time. It's not an exaggeration to say that many people spend the majority of their day in a state of non-presence.

We waste time dwelling on the past, usually on depressing things like losses, failed relationships, or other negative experiences. We play these experiences over and over in our heads, thinking that if we had done this or said that things would have turned out differently. We often blame others but more often, we blame ourselves.

Oftentimes, these negative memories are accompanied by unhealthy emotions like bitterness, resentment, and guilt. These emotions, when left to simmer inside of us can literally become toxic, affecting both our physical and mental wellbeing.

The other side of the coin is the future. We spend hours thinking about the future - worrying, more precisely. We worry

about our health, our finances, our children, and our careers. We overload our brains with 'what if?' questions. What if I lose my job? What if I fail the exam? What if I don’t meet that deadline? What if I can’t make my mortgage payments?

Whatever your fears and worries are, join the club. We all have our personal 'what ifs' that keep us tossing and turning at night.

Why is this a waste of precious time? Because the past and the future are out of your control. There's no way on earth you can control either.

Yes, you can learn valuable lessons from past experiences and move on. But will dwelling on them transport you back in time to fix things?

You can - and should - plan for the future as best as you can. But will worry and anxiety about the future steer things to go your way?

This is why learning to live in the present is the best option for living a happy, productive, and fulfilling life. When you live in the present, you're in control. You're in control of what you say and do in the present moment and how you react and behave in certain situations. This is very empowering.

Stop here and reflect for a moment. When was the last time you were present, fully in the moment and totally focused on the here and now? When was the last time you were in control?

Another word for being present is mindfulness. It is one of the most powerful and transformative qualities you can develop. Mindfulness is an innate quality that each person is born with. As young children, we had no conception of past or future. We lived fully and completely in the present moment.

Re-learning this powerful trait is essential in order to become your best possible self.

The benefits of mindfulness

Here are just some of the benefits of mindfulness that can dramatically shift your mindset and change your life:

- It significantly reduces stress and anxiety.
- It improves personal relationships by promoting higher empathy.
- It allows us to release toxic emotions like bitterness, anger, jealousy and deep grudges.

- It breeds acceptance and helps us cope better with hardship and adversity.
- It promotes physical and mental health.
- It promotes better sleep.
- It enhances productivity.
- It improves mental focus and clarity.
- It improves emotional wellbeing.

7 Ways to Become More Present

Living mindfully can become second nature to you if you train your brain to make it a habit.

These 7 exercises will put that process into motion. The more you practice them, the faster your brain will make mindfulness a habit and guide your behavior accordingly.

Mindfulness breeds mindfulness. As your brain starts to develop the habit, you will stay mindful for longer periods of time until you are able to remain present throughout your day.

These exercises require nothing more than a few minutes of your time each day to begin a dramatic transformation that will amaze you.

Exercise 1: Mindful mealtimes

Grabbing a quick lunch at our desks or bolting down a hurried breakfast is common practice for many of us. Oftentimes, we can’t even remember what we ate just a few hours before. This is because we eat mindlessly.

Another common sign of mindless eating is looking down to find your plate or a bag of chips empty. Your mind was somewhere else, and you don't even remember eating the food, much less what it tasted like.

This exercise not only promotes mindfulness but also fosters healthy eating and gratitude. Make your mealtimes mindful and enjoyable with the following steps:

- Arrange the meal before you and spend a few moments gazing at the food.
- Notice all of the details of the meal you're about to eat. Focus on the different colors and smells, how the food is arranged on the plate and even the shapes and colors of the various plates or containers.

- Say a little prayer of gratitude for the blessing you're about to enjoy.
- Pick up your fork or spoon and be totally aware of how it feels in your hand.
- Keeping your attention solely on the meal before you, pick up the first forkful; and place it in your mouth and hold it there for a moment.
- Chew slowly, really savoring the tastes and flavors of the food as it moves in your mouth.
- Bring your awareness to the different flavors and mentally express them: sweet, sour, spicy, hot, cold…
- As you swallow, feel the food moving down and settling in your stomach.

The aim of this exercise is to help you become totally present when engaging in activities like eating. When practiced consistently, it will spread to other activities and help you stay focused in the here and now.

Exercise 2: Mindful listening

There's a saying that God created us with two ears and one mouth for a reason. We are meant to listen more than we talk!

So, do you really listen when having conversations with others? Do you engage in mindful listening where you focus on the person talking, their facial expressions, body language and tone of voice? Most importantly, do you really listen to their words?

We often think that we're active listeners when in fact, we're anything but. Our minds wander as we nod absently, our eyes dart around looking at other things and people. Our minds race ahead as we think of what we're going to say in reply. That's not mindful listening.

Practice this exercise by listening mindfully to at least one person every day:

- Bring your full attention to the person speaking and firmly dismiss any distracting thoughts.
- Keep your body still, don't fidget or fiddle with your hands. Look fully into the person's face and make eye contact.
- Listen intently to what is being said. Do not interrupt or think ahead for a reply. Just listen.
- Be aware of the person's body language and tone of voice.
- When it's your turn to speak, pause for a moment and organize your thoughts and words. Give a reply that reflects that you have listened carefully or ask questions that reflect that you have listened intently.

- Later, take a moment to recall one important thing that the person said and one important detail, such as the color of their eyes or what they were wearing.

As you learn to listen mindfully, your own words will become wiser and more empathetic. Your relationships on every level will improve. People feel appreciated and valued when they are heard, and your attention will be reciprocated. You'll always find willing and attentive listeners in others as well.

It also goes without saying that being a mindful listener will make you wildly popular as well!

Exercise 3: Mindful senses

This exercise is best practiced outdoors when you're walking down the street, sitting in the park or along a nature stroll, for example. It involves engaging all of your senses other than sight.

Our fast-paced digital lifestyle has dulled our senses to a great degree. We rarely stop to smell the roses. Practice the following steps to keep your senses sharp, and yourself more present.

- Instead of merely looking at things, unfocus your eyes a little and use your sense of sight, touch, and smell to become mindful of your surroundings.
- Become aware of different sounds such as distant voices, car horns, dogs barking, and so on.
- If you're in nature, identify as many sounds as you can; wind rustling through trees, birds singing, waves crashing on the beach and so on. You'll be surprised at how many individual sounds you can pick up.
- Bring your full awareness to these sounds that normally, you would never notice.
- Next, engage your sense of smell. Perhaps you can smell cooking; try to identify what it is. It may be the scent of flowers or freshly-mown grass. Inhale deeply and become mindful of these various smells.
- Engage your sense of touch by taking off your shoes and feeling the soft grass under your feet, stroking the petals of a flower or a branch.

Practice this exercise whenever you are outdoors to keep you more mindful throughout your day. You can practice at the mall or grocery store as well. These places offer a wide variety of sounds, smells and textures to hone your senses.

Exercise 4: Mindful sensation

This is a rather weird but brilliant exercise for developing mindful awareness of your body. Over time, it will help you become more attuned to your body and heighten your intuition.

- Sitting down with your eyes closed, take a few deep breaths, until your body is relaxed and loose.
- Pinch the soft inner part of your upper arm.
- Pinch the soft flesh as hard as you can stand it, then let go.
- Focus on the sensation of pain as it spreads through your arm.
- Identify how the pain feels: burning, tingling, throbbing, etc.
- Continue to be mindful of the pain as it fades then disappears.
- Repeat the above steps two more times.

When you develop mindful sensation, you'll be able to check in with your body throughout the day to quickly detect how you're feeling, and whether you need to take a break or de-stress.

Exercise 5: Mindful pause

You can use your phone alert for this exercise to keep you practicing it consistently. The goal of the exercise is to bring you back to the present several times during the day and train the brain to perform tasks mindfully.

- Simply pause at intervals during the day and become completely mindful of whatever you're doing at that moment.
- Say you're making a salad for dinner. Pause and bring your mind to the task at hand. Engage all of your senses to become mindful of the process. Note the colors and smells of the vegetables and their various textures and how they feel in your hands. Become absorbed in the feeling of running water over your hands as you wash the vegetables, and the sensation as you peel and chop them.
- Remain present until you've finished the task.
- If you're working at your desk, pause and become mindful of your posture, the feel of the chair beneath you, the items on your desk, the feel of the mouse and keyboard as you use them.
- Try to take these mindful pauses during different activities and tasks to train your mind to quickly become present regardless of what you're doing or the number of distractions around you.

Take these short mindful pauses several times throughout the day to ground yourself in the present moment. Our minds often wonder when we're doing mundane tasks. But even something as simple as taking a shower or washing dishes can be an amazing experience when you do it mindfully!

The effect of this exercise will last for some time afterwards so that you will continue to stay present and grounded. It's useful to take a mindful pause before an important meeting or presentation, or when planning projects. You'll experience more clarity of mind, better focus and increased efficiency because you're totally in the moment.

Exercise 6: Mindful silence

In this challenging exercise, you simply sit and listen to the silence around you. Yes, silence can be heard and you can become so immersed in the present that you can actually listen to it.

This exercise is probably the most difficult because it's counterintuitive; or at least it seems to be. Since our conception of silence is the lack of sound we can’t listen to 'no sound'.

However, when you learn to listen to silence, you will have truly begun to master the art of mindfulness. It will take more practice than the other exercises but don’t get discouraged - you'll get the hang of it.

In the beginning, you can expect to be distracted with a lot of thoughts flooding your brain as well as every little noise around you. Dismiss these as soon as they come up and continue to sit in the silence. The goal is to block your mind to everything bit the silence.

- Choose a time and place where you can sit in complete silence. Early morning when the household is asleep could be a good time, or whenever you are alone and your surroundings are quiet.
- Choose the quietest spot you can find where you won't be disturbed. Make sure it's as isolated as possible from outdoor noises and indoor sounds like TVs and even the hum of household appliances (when you're trying to focus on silence, these will seem to be magnified, whereas normally, you wouldn't notice them).
- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.

- Breathe deeply for 2 or 3 minutes, inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. As you breathe out, feel the tension slowly leave your body as your muscles relax.
- Close your eyes. Slowly, bring your mind to the silence around you… just listen to it.
- Dismiss distracting thoughts as they come to you.
- If noise distracts you, dismiss it without judgment. Don't allow feelings of frustration or annoyance to distract your focus.
- Let the silence surround you completely. Imagine your body melting and becoming one with the silence.
- When you've ready, open your eyes and take a few deep breaths.

Exercise 7: Mindfulness meditation

Mindfulness meditation is one of the most powerful methods for achieving presence of mind. It is designed to minimize negative thoughts, bring calmness to an overstimulated mind and relax the body. It brings you into a tranquil state of full presence in the here and now.

The methods of mindfulness meditation differ slightly, but they are all centered around deep breathing, awareness of the body and the nonjudgmental acceptance of thoughts and feelings. In fact, five minutes of deep breathing where you focus only on the sensation of inhaling and exhaling is a mindfulness meditation in itself.

Studies have shown that mindfulness meditation reduces stress, anxiety and depression. Research also suggests that it may lower the risk of heart disease by lowering the heart rate and promoting better circulation. It can help boost immunity, reduce aches and pains and generate feelings of optimism and hopefulness.

If you're new to meditation or think it's not for you, the combined physical and mental benefits certainly make it worth a try. You will be pleasantly surprised at how great you feel afterward and will understand why meditation is a core part of many people's lives.

How to Practice Mindfulness Meditation

The first rule is consistent practice. Think of mindfulness meditation as a workout for your brain to build 'mindfulness muscle'. Just as you need to exercise regularly to build physical muscle, meditation will only have results when practiced consistently.



However, studies have shown that you don’t need to meditate daily. Three to four times weekly is sufficient to bring about the desired results. After about 8 weeks of consistent practice, the brain actually begins to change, becoming more mindful and present.

If you're a beginner, guided meditation will work best for you. You can invest in a mindfulness meditation app that contains dozens of guided meditation tracks as well as other cool features like alerts and scheduling options.

Another great option is YouTube, an excellent resource for a wide variety of mindfulness meditations. It's best to start with short ones and progress from there.

That's all there is to it! Make the commitment to practice regularly and enjoy!

11 Powerful Mindfulness Tips

Here are some extra tips to help you stay present and boost the power of these 7 mindfulness exercises. Adding just one or two of these to your exercises can greatly improve their effectiveness. In fact, some of them are mini-mindfulness exercises in themselves.

1. Focus on objects

Train yourself to be alert to simple objects that you usually take for granted. For example, the coffee mug on your desk, a pen in your hand, your cell phone, or an object on a shelf.

Start to notice these simple objects as you go about your daily tasks, taking in their details as if you're seeing them for the first time. Indeed, you'll be surprised to discover that you really are seeing them mindfully for the first time! Don’t pause for too long, just learn to be more attentive to little things to hone your sense of presence.

2. Practice mindfulness sitting down

Whenever you can, practice mindfulness exercises sitting down in a comfortable position. This is not mandatory but it can be very helpful at the beginning as it promotes more focus and concentration.

Even when you are outdoors and would like to take a mindful pause, find a place to sit such as a park bench, a bus stop bench, or a waiting area. Always take a few deep breaths and relax before you begin the exercise.

3. Boost your concentration

Strong focus and concentration are the foundation of mindfulness. In fact, it's probably the most challenging part of learning to become more present.

You can boost your concentration levels and train your mind to focus faster by solving crossword and logic puzzles, playing chess and even card games like poker. Brainteasers are another great option.

As your concentration levels improve, you will have less distracting thoughts as you practice mindfulness exercises. You'll also be able to become immersed and present much faster.

4. Learn to move slowly

Our crazy, hectic lifestyles have bred in us the habit of rushing even when there's no need to! The result is that all of our movements are fast and hurried. We rush through tasks mindlessly; we rush from place to place mindlessly and multitask like crazy. All of this is the antithesis of mindfulness.

Slow down! Remember, mindfulness is about stopping to smell the roses. And one of the goals of being present is calm and tranquility both mental and physical.

Observe yourself as you move throughout the day and intentionally slow down your movements. Learn to slow down your pace as you walk, climb stairs instead of running up, and sit down and stand up slowly. As you go about your tasks, also try to do things more deliberately and at a slower pace.

Slowing things down will promote more relaxation, focus and yes, mindfulness.

5. Practice affirmations

Affirmations are powerful statements that can help rewire your brain to become mindful more quickly. They are simple, positive statements that you repeat to yourself in the present tense.

Our brains are amazing organs but they lack one important characteristic that can work in our favor - they're unable to distinguish between thoughts and real physical action.

So, when you state affirmations like, "I choose to be mindful In all that I do" or "I am present and fully grounded in the moment", your brain believes that this is physically true. It begins to create new neural pathways that guide your behavior so that you are indeed more mindful and present.

Repeat affirmations to yourself every day. They're a great way to start off a mindfulness exercise as they help dispel distracting

thoughts. They're also a great way to nip negative self-talk in the bud.

You can choose three or four affirmations to begin with and replace them with new ones every couple of weeks. You can also post them on your computer desktop, on your phone or on the fridge where you can see them often.

6. Commune with nature

Being in nature fosters mindfulness by helping you slow down and relax. It also fosters feelings of gratitude and tranquility and helps an overstimulated brain wind down.

Get out into nature as often as you can. There's nothing like an uplifting walk along a scenic trail or on the beach at sunset. Savor these moments of communion with Mother Nature and engage all of your senses.

Being present is often described as grounding yourself in the here and now. It’s a fitting analogy for finding peace in nature by grounding our roots into the earth.

7. Don't dwell on the past

When you make the decision to live mindfully, you need to be alert to your thought process and where it's leading you. Dwelling on the past is a route you want to avoid.

When you catch yourself ruminating about the past, simply stop yourself. Take control of your thoughts calmly and firmly. Focus on a nearby object to bring yourself back to the present or repeat a couple of affirmations.

When you teach your brain that reliving past events isn't something you enjoy, it will do it less often. Negative memories will not fade away completely but they will become infrequent, with bigger gaps between them.

8. Don’t fret about the future

Plan for the future as best as you can. Make sure you have taken the necessary steps to achieve your desired goals and outcomes with what was in your control.

When you catch yourself fretting about the future, remind yourself that it's out of your control. Worrying and stressing about it is not going to change things. Dismiss the thoughts, again, telling your brain that they are unwanted.

Dispel worrying thoughts by repeating affirmations or immersing yourself in a short mindfulness meditation.

9. Keep a journal

If you enjoy expressing yourself in writing, a mindfulness journal can help you on your journey and enable you to keep track of your progress.

You can record the exercises you practiced and how you felt afterwards. You can write down affirmations that you found particularly inspiring.

Another great journaling technique is to record conversations that you had and list details of what you observed mindfully, and what you can do to listen more mindfully next time.

10. Listen to music

Music is food for the soul but also for mindfulness. The keyword here is 'listening'.

Playing music in the background can calm the mind but listening to your favorite music mindfully is another experience altogether.

Create a playlist of your favorite tunes, put your feet up and enjoy a great mindfulness listening experience. Immerse yourself in the music, focus on the lyrics and the message of the song. Pay attention to the rhythms, beats, and melodies.

You may have been listening to certain songs for years but you'll be amazed at the nuances you'll discover when you listen mindfully.

This is the perfect relaxing activity to engage in before going to bed as well.

11. Patience!

Like all invaluable skills and qualities, mindfulness is not acquired overnight. The process of training your brain and giving it time to adapt to the change takes time – and patience!

So, stick to it and don’t get discouraged. The transformation will take place slowly but surely. And you'll be so glad you stuck to it!

Conclusion

Mindfulness is by no means a trendy fad or bogus concept. Although fairly recent to the West, it has long been the foundation of all Eastern philosophies and spiritual practices. It has been recognized since the earliest times as the secret to happiness, acceptance, and fulfillment.

Today, a wealth of research has scientifically confirmed the numerous benefits of mindfulness. Many psychologists and therapists are now incorporating mindfulness exercises and meditation into their treatment programs, with amazing results.

Mindfulness is a powerful tool that just makes total sense when you think of its benefits. In fact, learning to live mindfully is

more important today than ever before in a world that's gone berserk.

The seven exercises discussed here in addition to the helpful tips are all you need to transform your life on every level. Start practicing them today and experience the magic that being present can work in your life.