

What's the difference between mindfulness and being present?

There's a lot of well-intended advice about practising mindfulness and being present in the moment. But what do these terms really mean, why are they important and how do you achieve them? Those are all good questions. Let's take a look.

Mindful practices are things you can do to centre yourself and find calm, like deep breathing exercises, yoga, meditation and walking in nature. Regularly practising mindfulness can help bring clarity, reduce stress and ease symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Part of mindfulness is being present in the moment. When you practise mindfulness, you're purposely making yourself aware of what's going on inside and around you. You take time to observe your immediate surroundings, thoughts and feelings without judging or controlling them, that is, without dissecting, criticising or trying to solve them. The goal is to simply let them be as they are.

When you're present in the moment like this, it helps you temporarily let go of what may be weighing on you mentally and emotionally. Giving yourself this break can help you find calm, gain clarity, accept where you're at and move forwards. What's weighing on you doesn't disappear, but finding this calm, clarity and acceptance can help better prepare you to manage your thoughts and feelings.

How this works in real life

Consider a scenario in which you're staring down a major work deadline. Your mind is racing trying to figure out how you'll get everything done, both at work and in your personal life.

Physically, you may even be showing signs of stress, like a faster heartbeat, shaky hands and sweaty underarms. These anxious thoughts and feelings make it hard to focus on your work, which only delays getting it done and increases your worries.

A mindful practice to help centre yourself and find calm would be to focus on being present in the moment. Literally, stopping what you're doing to sit still, close your eyes, breathe deeply and be aware of what you're feeling and thinking. No judgment. No solutions. Just letting the thoughts come and go until eventually they lose their hold on your nerves and you feel calmer and clearer.

Now it's easier to focus. Break your big project into smaller steps and sort out the must-haves from the nice-to-haves, helping you move forwards more confidently.

Ready to give being present a try?

Think about ways you could be more present in your life. Note one idea for each day of the week, then do your best to do it. For example:

- On Monday, go on a power walk in your local area. Instead of playing music, pay attention to how you feel taking each step and what you see.
- On Tuesday when you wake up, lie in bed for 5 minutes to do a mental scan of your body. Do you feel healthy, comfortable and well rested, or something else? What can you learn from what you observe?
- On Wednesday, go to that free meditation class offered through work.



At the end of the week, reflect on what you observed and learnt from being present in the moment. Then create a plan for the following week, and continue this practice until being present in the moment becomes a natural part of your day.

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Sources

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