

Informal Mindfulness Exercises

We're all busy, and many of us don't have time (or are unwilling to make time) to formally practice mindfulness skills. However, we can practice informally throughout the day. Here are a couple of examples:

1) Mindfulness in Your Morning Routine

Pick an activity that constitutes part of your daily morning routine, such as brushing your teeth, shaving, or having a shower. When you do it, totally focus on what you are doing: the body movements, the taste, the touch, the smell, the sight, the sound etc.

For example, when you're in the shower, notice the sounds of the water as it sprays out of the nozzle, and as it hits your body as it gurgles down the hole. Notice the temperature of the water, and the feel of it in your hair, and on your shoulders, and running down our legs. Notice the smell of the soap and shampoo, and the feel of them against your skin. Notice the sight of the water droplets on the walls or shower screen, the water dripping down your body and the steam rising upwards. Notice the movements of your arms as you wash or scrub or shampoo.

When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and bring your attention back to the shower.

Again and again, your attention will wander. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to the shower.

2) Mindfulness of Domestic Chores

Pick a chore that you normally try to rush through, or distract yourself from; or one for which you just 'grit your teeth' and try to 'get through it'. For example: ironing clothes, washing dishes, vacuuming floors, making the kids' lunches. Aim to do this chore as a mindfulness practice.

E.g., when ironing clothes: notice the color and shape of the clothing, and the pattern made by the creases, and the new pattern as the creases disappear. Notice the hiss of the steam, the creak of the ironing board, the faint sound of the iron moving over the material. Notice the grip of your hand on the iron, and the movement of your arm and your shoulder.

If boredom or frustration arises, simply acknowledge it, and bring your attention back to the task at hand.

When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and bring your attention back to what you are doing.

Again and again, your attention will wander. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to your current activity.

Now write down some informal mindfulness exercises for yourself:

During my morning routine, I will practice mindfulness of

During my evening routine, I will practice mindfulness of

During the week, I will practice mindfulness of the following chore (s)

Now write down any other quick 'n' easy informal mindfulness exercises you can think of – e.g. while waiting in queues or at traffic lights you could practice mindfulness of your impatience; or when eating dinner, you could aim to eat the first two mouthfuls mindfully.

At the end of each week, pull this sheet out and see how well you have followed it.

Mindful breathing practice enables you to develop several skills: the ability to focus, and engage in what you are doing; the ability to let thoughts come and go without getting caught up in them; the ability to refocus when you realize you are distracted; and the ability to let your feelings be as they are without trying to control them. Even 5 minutes practice a day can make a difference over time. 10 minutes twice a day or 20 minutes once a day is even better.

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