

# Let's Talk: A mindfulness exercise

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Hi, my name is Eva. Let's talk about mindfulness.

I'm guessing you clicked here, because you recognized the term mindfulness, and you would like to know more about this practice that has received so much attention in the past few years. Or perhaps you already have an existing practice, and you want to know more to return to the core tenets. Either way, I welcome you.

## What is mindfulness?

I thought we could start by defining the term mindfulness. Merriam-Webster defines mindfulness as a practice of maintaining heightened or complete awareness of thoughts, emotions, and experiences in a moment to moment basis. Mindfulness is not meditation per se, but it is being consciously aware. You can develop mindfulness by practicing meditation, but the practice of meditation is not necessary to be mindful. In fact, it is often the preconceptions that we have about the prerequisites of developing a mindfulness practice that keep us from giving it a shot. The beauty of the mindfulness practice is that you can do it anytime, anywhere, without any equipment or specialized knowledge, without any assistance from anyone else, with often only the basic knowledge of what is necessary. And perhaps the best part of this experience is that you can do it without anyone noticing.

## Increase awareness through practice

Much like any other new behavior, developing a mindfulness practice takes time, and well, practice. The more you practice, the better you get at harnessing your awareness and bringing your attention to the present moment. In time, you will notice your efforts give way to spontaneity. You will notice that your practice increases in duration and frequency. Regardless of your experience, you probably had moments of effortless mindfulness, since mindfulness is an inherent feature of every human being. Perhaps you found yourself watching behaviors and speech of your loved one, finding yourself in a space of non-judgment and acceptance. Perhaps you find yourself on the beach, or in the mountains, and felt connection with everything that was around you.

## **Observe your own experiences**

Take a moment to think of your own examples, when you might have experienced mindful awareness, coupled with what is called radical acceptance – meaning that you are accepting of everything that you notice within the field of experience.

## **'Outside and inside': A brief exercise**

Often the most challenging part of learning a new skill, is finding the time and motivation to try something new. Well, and the old can be all too comfortable to let go of. You're in luck. The next portion of this presentation focuses on a brief guided mindfulness practice, called Outside and Inside. This practice is described in the Mindfulness and Acceptance Workbook that is authored by Kirk Strosahl and Patricia Robinson. This exercise focuses on guiding the awareness using the kinesthetic and visual cues. This exercise will help you develop an ability to guide your awareness from inside to the outside, and then back in again.

## **Focus on your breathing**

Let's try this. So for the time being, just allow yourself to breathe in and out. Notice your lungs. Let the air in and out. Slowly. And just focus on that. Focus on the sensations of the air passing through your lungs, against the back of your throat, filling your lungs. Focus on the sensation of your chest and your abdomen rising and falling, with each inhalation and exhalation. Notice the sensation of a wave. Ebbing and flowing. And with each wave, the energy going onward and outward, as it accommodates the rhythmic flow of your body, as the air goes in and out.

## **Notice the beat of your heart**

Notice your heart. Can you feel the pumping sensation? Can you feel your pulse? If you'd like, you can lightly press two of your fingers against either side of your neck to feel your carotid arteries, or you can place it on the inside of your wrist to feel the pulse there. Can you feel it? This is the sensation of your heart, carrying all the blood to parts of your body, with blood flowing like a river, with many tributaries. All so perfectly designed. All happening with a perfect awareness and acceptance.

## **Become aware of your surroundings**

Now, shift your consciousness to the edge between your body and what it's touching. Notice your clothes. Notice your shoes. If you are laying down, notice the floor, and notice the contact points

between your body and the floor. If you are sitting down, notice your body touching the chair. Stay aware of those contact points. Notice your body. Notice the floor supporting your feet. Can you describe those contact points to yourself? Take a few moments to do that.

## Notice your location

Now, bring your awareness to the space that you are in. To the room, to its smells and noises, perhaps it's a noise of a fan. Perhaps it's a noise of a bird right outside your window. Focus on these, and allow yourself to move to a larger context. Focus on the building, or a house. What does it look like? What does it smell like? Can you hear the traffic? And if so, can you smell the cars? Can you see them carrying the people? You can focus on this and so much more, if only you allow yourself to become aware of the contact points between you and the things around you.

## A view from the outside

Now, shift your attention to the city or the town you are in. The larger geographic area. See from an eagle's eye view. Then it is below you. Can you see it? Can you see your building? And the buildings beside it? Can you see the parks? The cats, the dogs? The people, young and old? They are there, and you are watching. Accept it. Now allow yourself to move farther out. Now you see the world. You're gazing into space, and seeing the stars gaze back into you. Now allow yourself to see the end of space. The end of your consciousness.

## Retrace your steps

Whenever you notice something smaller, like a thought, or a sensation on your body, allow yourself to be with it. Say "Hello," and let it go. Allow your awareness to expand back to the edge of your consciousness. Then spend some time there. Whenever you're ready, allow yourself to return. Retrace your steps. See the world again. Take in its colors, as you return. Can you see the buildings? Can you see the parks and the people? The cats and the dogs? Can you see your building? Your room, yourself? Whenever you return to your body, do you notice your breath? Do you notice your heartbeat?

## Return your focus inside

When you're back in your body, feel the pulse, feel the breathing. Feel your body move as it takes in the breath to sustain it.

## Be in the moment through mindfulness

Think about what happened to your awareness when you allowed it to roam free. I would like to end with a quote by Mother Theresa. "Be happy in the moment. That's enough. Each moment is all we need. Not more."

## Resources For Living

Mindfulness exercise source: Stosahl, K. D. & Robinson, P. J. (2008). *The Mindfulness & Acceptance Workbook for Depression*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger

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44.27.328.1-RFL (7/17)