

# “I find it very hard to relax. Is there anything I can do to change that?”

## Relax through mindfulness.



Most of us go about our day following the same routines, doing the same tasks, without giving things much thought. We don't pay conscious attention to what we see, hear, touch, taste, smell or feel emotionally. All too often, we end up spending much of our lives on auto pilot. Practicing mindfulness can bring us out of distraction, help us appreciate our surroundings and provide many health benefits.

Mindfulness is the act of paying attention on purpose. This is not simply being aware of what we're doing, but taking the time to recognize the senses we experience.

### Why choose mindfulness?

- Mindfulness teaches us acceptance without judgment. We learn to accept our feelings whether they're good, bad or indifferent, through recognition and acknowledgement.
- It reduces stress because:
  - You take some time every day to stop and just be in the moment.
  - You reflect on how your body responds to what's happening around you.
  - You observe your thoughts and try to separate yourself from them, as though they belong to someone else.
- It helps you understand that you don't have control over everything in your life, but you do have the ability to choose how you respond to situations around you.
- You become aware of what your emotions are before you make decisions.
- It helps you work through difficult emotions such as fear, anger and resentment.
- You appreciate when you're feeling strong, healthy, creative or happy.
- When you learn to do things with purpose, you begin to live a more meaningful and satisfied life.

### Other benefits of mindfulness may include:

- Reduced risk of heart attacks and strokes
- Decreased blood pressure, anxiety, depression and stress
- Decreased surgical recovery time
- Better management of chronic conditions such as pain, sleep disorders and asthma
- Increased immunity, optimism, memory, self-control and self-awareness

## Ways to practice mindfulness

- Pay attention to your thoughts and feelings throughout the day. Are there repetitive thoughts that come to mind several times in a day? Consider writing them down or beginning a journal.
- While driving, turn off the radio and put your phone away. Pay complete attention to your surroundings.
- Go for a walk, and notice things around you such as newly planted flowers, animals playing in a yard or the feeling of the sun warming your body.
- Sit in silence for five minutes or longer. Practice mindfulness exercises to calm your mind. (Visit [fallonhealth.org](http://fallonhealth.org) and click Healthwise® Knowledgebase from the home page. Search “mindfulness” for exercises you can do.)
- At meal times, pay attention to how much and how fast you’re eating. How does the food taste? What is the texture?
- Carve out at least 10 minutes during the day to do something just for you. Go for a walk, play with the dog or read.
- Take deep mindful breaths. Breathe in through your nose and exhale through your mouth with a sigh. Imagine with each exhale that you’re letting go of any obligations, and all the thoughts occupying your mind. Give yourself permission to be in this moment without any expectations.

Practicing mindfulness is a way to focus on the present, not get lost in the past or worry about the future. It relaxes your mind and body. Once you learn to be mindful, the benefits will begin to spill over into other areas of your life, helping to decrease daily stress. Learning to accept both positive and negative experiences can help you move forward with a more balanced life.

