

## Mindfulness tools

### Action plan for mindfulness

Complete the following to boost your motivation and commitment to mindfulness in the next week or longer term. You will find lots of ideas below, try to pick **one** which seems easy for you to incorporate into your life.

My goal is...

Example: to incorporate mindfulness into my week

Now on to action planning; it is important to include the following in any action plan:

What action(s) you are going to take

How much you are going to do

When you are going to take action

How many days a week/ month you plan to take action

Example: This week I will practice finger breathing (WHAT) once (HOW MUCH) before I have breakfast (WHEN) every day (HOW MANY DAYS)

Complete the following:

This week I will...

------(WHAT)

------(HOW MUCH)

------(WHEN)

------(HOW MANY DAYS)

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How committed and motivated are you to this action plan on a scale from 0-10 (10 being the highest)?

What would increase your motivation and commitment? How can you use this to help yourself?

### **Mindfulness tools**

There are many tools below. Choose one and use this for at least a week to see how well it works for you.

For information on mindfulness and supporting evidence see the ‘Mindfulness Resource’.

### **Mindful check-ins**

A mindful check-in is a way of becoming aware of your internal state at any point in your day. You can check-in to your breath, your body sensations and/or your feelings. You don’t have to adopt a particular posture or be in a particular location, simply tune in to whatever is happening for you with curiosity and openness and without judgment. Regular mindful check-ins help to build your awareness and to realise the benefits of mindfulness.

Dr Chris Walsh, one of Australia’s leading mindfulness pioneers, suggests that doing simple mindfulness check-ins throughout the day has three significant effects:

- It helps to enhance positive experiences
- It helps us manage difficult experiences
- It helps us manage transitions

In relation to the latter, Walsh notes that “managing transitions requires you to step back and reassess new situations. Sometimes we bring in something from the old situation that is difficult to let go of.

For example, you may have had a hard day at work where you have had difficult interactions with co-workers ... It is very hard to leave that kind of thing behind as you come home.

If you are not able to leave it behind, at least you can acknowledge it in a respectful and mindful way, first to yourself and then to others if appropriate. If you let others know that you are stressed it can help them to orient themselves to you. (2016, para. 22-23)”

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As part of a regular mindfulness check-in, you could ask yourself the following three questions:

- What are you feeling in your body?
- What are you thinking?
- What emotions are you experiencing?

Mindfulness check-ins are especially important when you feel triggered to react instead of respond. By stopping and asking the above questions to really ‘check-in’ with yourself, you may find the drive to react is suppressed. As a result, you will hopefully find it easier to choose how to respond.

### **Mini Mindful Moments (also known as ‘Spot Meditations’)**

Research shows that mini-mindfulness sessions that last around one-minute when enjoyed throughout the day are just as effective as having a daily, hour long sitting meditations. Eric Harrison calls these mini-mindfulness sessions ‘spot meditations’; here they will be referred to as Mini Mindful Moments.

These Mini Mindful Moments are a gentle way of starting to engage with mindfulness practices. This moves people away from traditional long, sitting meditations and unrealistic expectations to empty their mind of all thoughts.

Mindfulness may not be practiced because people feel they haven’t got the time. People often say ‘I know I should do more of it but...’! Using Mini Mindful Moments throughout your day is easy once you have some idea of how to do this.

By following the main elements of mindfulness- combining awareness of your breath with focusing on what you are doing and/or what is around you- you will be able to experience every moment as fully as possible.

To be mindful, you must slow down, do one activity at a time and bring your full awareness to both the activity and your inner experience of it. Once we learn to master these basic skills, we can practise mindfulness anywhere.

Mini Mindful Moments can be very short and can be done anywhere and anytime. For example, you can simply become more mindful while walking, eating, doing exercise or even housework.

You can use the ‘down’ time, when you’re waiting, on public transport or trying to fall asleep at night. It is possible to find twenty to fifty Mini Mindful Moments every day but remember just 5 minutes of mindfulness a day can make a difference so just five moments of one minute each can make all the difference.

## **Mindfulness tools**

### **Examples of Mini Mindful Moments/ spot meditations**

You can use a number of techniques in short bursts throughout your day to develop mindfulness. Here are a few examples and there will be many more 'tools' in this document that you can use in this way.

- When you walk focus on the sensation of your feet touching the ground.
- As you awaken in the morning, bring your attention to your breathing. Instead of letting your mind spin off into yesterday or today, take mindful breaths. Focus on your breathing and sense the effects of breathing throughout your body.
- Instead of rushing through your daily routine, slow down and enjoy something special, e.g. a flower that bloomed, the sound of birds, the wind in the trees.
- Pay attention to your journey whether you are walking, driving or a passenger. Take some deep breaths and focus on relaxing your body.
- When waiting at a red light, pay attention to your breathing and absorb the landscape around you.
- When you arrive at your destination, take a few moments to orient yourself; breathe consciously and calmly, relax your body, then begin.
- When sitting at your desk or keyboard, become aware of the subtle signs of physical tension and take a break to stretch or walk around.
- Walk mindfully... can you see and appreciate something new in the environment? Try to enjoy walking without rushing.
- As you return home, consciously make the transition into your home environment. If possible, after greeting your family or housemates, give yourself a few minutes alone to ease the transition.
- As you go to sleep, let go of today and tomorrow and take some slow, mindful breaths.
- Stop and take a few deep breaths as you walk towards a difficult encounter or in those moments of waiting between things, e.g. at a bus stop, while waiting for a friend or waiting for a meeting to start.

### **What are the benefits of Mini Mindful Moments?**

#### **You learn to pause**

Pausing adds a different type of rhythm to our day and is an effective way of taking some control over the day's progress, even when things may seem 'out of control'.

## **Mindfulness tools**

### **You begin to become more aware of your body**

Mindfulness is very much about the body, not just the mind. The two most popular mindful techniques (following the breath and scanning sensations in the body) rely on paying attention to the body to calm the mind.

Our body and its connection to the brain is a wonderful and complex thing. We too often ignore the cues our body sends us. So, if your back is hurting because you've been sitting for too long, pay attention. Stand up and move around. You'll quickly feel better for it.

### **You begin to become more aware of your emotions and feelings**

Learning to read the way that your body, mind and emotions act as a connected network of signals means that when you sense something in your 'gut', you can pause and try to discern exactly what's going on. Often just acknowledging, naming and noting a feeling will allow you to move forward more confidently.

### **Other Mindfulness Techniques**

Below are some more mindfulness techniques for you to try. As mentioned previously these may be applied as 'Mini Mindful Moments'. It may be best to select just one per week before moving on to another. If some seem similar to others it's still worth playing around with them over a number of weeks so that you get a slightly different mindfulness experience each week.

### **Mindful thinking**

1. Notice your thoughts acknowledge them and let them go.
2. Name your thoughts, e.g. say to yourself- 'I'm having an unhelpful thought'.

NB: one of the facets of mindfulness is to observe but without judgement or criticism. So, try to observe and acknowledge the thought in a matter-of-fact way, as devoid of emotion as possible.

3. Thoughts as bubbles and clouds- see or visualise your thoughts as something, give them a physical representation, e.g. bubbles, clouds or waves.
4. Acknowledge your thoughts and take gentle action- once you've recognised a thought do something with it. If you see it as a bubble, burst it. If it's a cloud, let the wind blow it across the sky in your mind and out of sight.

## Mindfulness tools

### Just feel it

Mindfulness can be many things, but the goal is always to refocus on the present moment, without judgment. Try this easy practice- take a moment to just notice how you feel...

- Feeling the Monday blues?
- Excited about the week or weekend to come?
- Nervous, happy or hopeful?

Avoid applying any judgment to your feelings, just notice that they're there, accept them and move on.

### Grounding

One of the best ways to calm yourself down is to ground yourself by directing your attention into the lower half of your body.

- Begin by focusing on your feet and how they feel inside your socks or shoes and against the ground.
- Expand your attention to include the sensations first in your lower legs and then in your upper legs – do they feel heavy or light? Warm or cool? Tingly or numb?
- Now include the sensations of your breathing, really relaxing as you breathe out.

This is a great way of grounding yourself and you can do it any time, with your eyes open or closed, while sitting or even while walking around. Ground yourself. Then breathe.

### Breath counting

This technique can be used in conjunction with grounding or on its own. Ground first if you are going to use the two techniques together.

Then, count to 6 as you breathe all the way in. On the out breath, count to 10 as you breathe all the way out.

Make sure you fit the numbers to your breath and not the other way around. If 6 and 10 don't work for you, find another ratio that does, as long as the out breath is at least two counts longer than the in breath.

If it's too hard to continue breathing while counting, count for one full breath- count from the in breath all the way through to the out breath. Take another breath without counting and then start counting again from the beginning of the next one all the way through to the out breath.

If you feel very panicked and can't manage the counting, say "in" to yourself as you breathe in, and "out" as you breathe out fully, trying to elongate the out breath. Keep going for at least one minute but go for as long as you need.

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### **Finger breathing**

Finger breathing is another version of breath counting. Hold one hand in front of you, palm facing towards you.

With the index finger of your other hand, trace up the outside length of your thumb while you breathe in, pausing at the top of your thumb and then trace it down the other side while you breathe out. That's one breath.

Trace up the side of the next finger while you breathe in, pause at the top, and then trace down the other side of that finger while you breathe out. That's two breaths.

Keep going, tracing along each finger as you count each breath. When you get to the end of the last finger, come back up that finger and do it in reverse.

This practice gives you something visual to focus on, something kinaesthetic to do with your hands, as well as focusing on counting and your breathing. It's very useful when there is a lot going on around you and it's hard to just close your eyes and focus inwards.

### **Tuning in by using the five senses**

This is a quick and relatively easy exercise to bring you to a mindful state quickly. If you only have a minute or two or, for whatever reason, you don't have the time or tools to try a body scan or fill out a worksheet, the five senses exercise can help you bring awareness to the current moment in a short amount of time.

### **Notice five things that you can see**

Look around you and bring your attention to five things that you can see. Pick something that you don't normally notice, like a shadow or a small crack in the concrete.

### **Notice four things that you can feel**

Bring awareness to four things that you are currently feeling, like the texture of your trousers, the feeling of the breeze on your skin or the smooth surface of a table you are resting your hands on.

### **Notice three things you can hear**

Take a moment to listen and note three things that you hear in the background. This can be the chirp of a bird, the hum of the refrigerator or the faint sounds of traffic from a nearby road.

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### Notice two things you can smell

Bring your awareness to smells that you usually filter out, whether they're pleasant or unpleasant. Perhaps the breeze is carrying a whiff of soil if you're outside or the smell of a restaurant across the street.

### Notice one thing you can taste

Focus on one thing that you can taste. You can take a sip of a drink, chew a piece of gum, eat something, notice the current taste in your mouth or open your mouth to search the air for a taste.

### The Mini-Mindfulness Exercise

Another great exercise to try if you are strapped for time is the mini-mindfulness exercise. In this lesson, there are three steps as below.

**Step 1:** step out of “automatic pilot” to bring awareness to what you doing, thinking, and sensing in this moment.

Try to pause and take a comfortable but dignified posture. Notice the thoughts that come up and acknowledge your feelings but let them pass. Attune yourself to your current state.

**Step 2:** bring awareness to the breathing for six breaths or a minute.

The goal is to focus attention on one thing: your breath. Be aware of the movement of your body with each breath; notice how your chest rises and falls, how your belly pushes in and out and how your lungs expand and contract. Find the pattern of your breath and ground yourself to the present with this awareness.

**Step 3:** expand awareness outward, first to the body then to the environment.

Allow the awareness to expand out to your body. Notice the sensations you are experiencing, like tightness, aches or perhaps a lightness in your face or shoulders. Keep in mind your body as a whole.

If you wish, you can then expand your awareness even further to the environment around you. Bring your attention to what is in front of you. Notice the colours, shapes, patterns, and textures of the objects you can see. Be present in this moment, in your awareness of your surroundings.

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### **Three Minute Breathing Space**

This exercise can be the perfect technique for those with busy lives and minds. The exercise is broken into three sections, one per minute as follows.

1. The first minute is spent on answering the question “how am I doing right now?”, while focusing on the feelings, thoughts and sensations that arise and trying to describe these in words and phrases.
2. The second minute is spent on keeping awareness on the breath.
3. The last minute is used for an expansion of attention from solely focusing on the breath to noticing how this affects the rest of the body.

This exercise can be rather challenging for keeping a quiet mind and often thoughts can pop up. The idea is not to block them, but rather just let them come into your mind and then disappear back out again. Try to just observe them.

### **Mindful Observation**

This exercise is simple but incredibly powerful because it helps you notice and appreciate seemingly simple elements of your environment in a more profound way. It's designed to connect us with the natural environment, something that is easily missed in the rush of daily life.

Choose a natural object from within your immediate environment and focus on watching it for a minute or two. This could be a flower, an insect, the clouds or the moon.

Don't do anything except notice the thing you are looking at. Simply relax into watching for as long as your concentration allows.

Look at this object as if you are seeing it for the first time. Visually explore every aspect of its formation and allow yourself to be consumed by its presence. Allow yourself to connect with its energy and its purpose within the natural world.

### **Mindful Awareness**

This exercise is designed to cultivate a heightened awareness and appreciation of simple daily tasks and the results they achieve. You can use the repetitive events of the day - the ringing telephone, a knock on the door, walking down the hall - as cues for mindful awareness or even a mini relaxation.

You can use physical 'touch point' cues such as opening the door; at the very moment you touch the door handle to open the door, stop for a moment and be mindful of where you are, how you feel in that moment and where the door will lead you. You can also just try to notice any tension and try to let this go.

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Similarly, the moment you open your computer to start work, take a moment to appreciate the hands that enable this process and the brain that facilitates your understanding of how to use the computer.

Your cues don't have to be physical ones. For example: each time you think a negative thought, you might choose to take a moment to stop, label the thought as unhelpful and release the negativity.

Another example is each time you smell food, you take a moment to stop and appreciate how lucky you are to have food to eat and share with your family and friends.

Choose a touch point that resonates with you today. Instead of going through your daily life on autopilot take occasional moments to stop and cultivate purposeful awareness of what you are doing and the blessings these actions bring to your life.

### **Mindful Listening**

This exercise is designed to open your ears to sound in a non-judgmental way and to be less swayed by any preconceptions. It is about listening to music from a neutral standpoint, with a present awareness and letting go of any judgement.

Select a piece of music you have never heard before. You may have something in your own collection that you have never listened to or you might choose to turn the radio on until something catches your attention.

Close your eyes and put on your headphones. Notice if you start to judge the music by its genre, title or artist name. If you do, try to let go of any labels and allow yourself to get lost in the music and explore different aspects of it. Even if it's not to your liking at first, let go of this and give your awareness full permission to absorb it.

Explore the song by listening to the dynamics of each instrument. Separate each sound in your mind and analyse each, one by one.

Hone in on any vocals: the sound of the voice, its range and tones. If there is more than one voice, separate them out.

The idea is to listen intently, to become fully entwined with the composition without preconception or judgment of the genre, artist, lyrics or instrumentation. Let go of thinking and really hear the music.

### **Mindful Immersion**

The intention of this exercise is to cultivate contentment in the moment and escape the persistent striving we find ourselves caught up in on a daily basis. Rather than anxiously wanting to finish an everyday routine task in order to get on with doing something else try to fully experience it like never before.

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For example: if you are cleaning your house, pay attention to every detail of the activity. Move away from treating this as a chore and instead create an entirely new experience by noticing every aspect of your actions:

Feel and become the motion when sweeping the floor, sense the muscles you use when scrubbing the dishes or cleaning the windows.

Try to think about routine tasks in a new way and discover new ways of tuning into the moment when you are carrying them out. Aim to immerse yourself in tasks and become aware of every step and how you are feeling physically and mentally.

If you find your mind wanders just gently bring it back to focusing on one element of the task. You may find it useful to use your senses to hone in on the task, e.g. noticing 5 things you have can see, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste.

Apart from the benefits this exercise can bring, by simply increasing mindfulness, you may even find you enjoy chores a little bit more!

### Mindful Appreciation

In this exercise all you have to do is notice 5 things in your day that usually go unappreciated. These things can be objects or you may choose people/ animals including pets.

The main aim of the exercise is to give thanks and appreciate the seemingly insignificant things in life. Try to notice things you usually overlook but support your existence in some way.

For example: electricity powers your kettle, the postman delivers your mail, your clothes provide you warmth, your nose lets you smell the flowers in the park, your ears let you hear the birds in the tree by the bus stop, but...

- Do you know how these things/processes came to exist, or how they really work?
- Have you ever properly acknowledged how these things benefit your life and the lives of others?
- Have you ever thought about what life might be like without these things?
- Have you ever stopped to notice their finer, more intricate details?
- Have you ever sat down and thought about the relationships between these things and how together they play an interconnected role in the functioning of the earth?

Once you have identified 5 things, you may want to extend this exercise by finding out more about their creation and purpose so that you can truly appreciate the way in which they support your life.

\*\* Remember to choose just one of the above exercises at any one time and practice this over a week \*\*