

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Fostering mindfulness

In the past ten years, *mindfulness* has become a buzzword that you will hear in doctor's offices, schools and universities, hospitals, workplaces and many other environments. What exactly is it and how can it benefit your day-to-day life? Let's unpack what mindfulness is and go over some simple ways you can incorporate it in to your life to achieve its benefits.

What is mindfulness?

The practice of mindfulness has its roots in Buddhist meditation but has been adapted away from any religious or spiritual traditions or beliefs. Contemporary, western mindfulness as it is taught in educational and health contexts, is a practice of being **attentive, aware** and **present** to one's sensations and thoughts, in the moment.

Mindfulness can be a formal practice such as yoga or meditation but it can also be something that you incorporate into what you already do – it is at its most basic, the practice of being fully present in the moment, no matter what the moment might consist of.

Why is mindfulness important?

Psychologists have been busy researching mindfulness' benefits and there is now a body of evidence that proves just how effective it is. Here are some of the ways mindfulness can improve your life:

- Reduces stress
- Improves memory and concentration
- Lessens emotional reactivity
- Increases empathy

For people living with mental health concerns like anxiety, depression and bipolar disorder, as well as physical ailments including chronic pain, mindfulness can be an effective form of treatment when it is combined with professional support.

Mindfulness is especially important today because of the rise of digital technology. Since we are always connected and have all our friends and colleagues in the palms of our hands, it is more difficult than ever to simply be present in the moment. As we will examine below, one of the ways to increase mindfulness is to regulate our relationships with mobile devices, email and social media.

Mindful attitude

To approach something mindfully, there is a certain attitude you need to foster. Here are some elements of a mindful attitude:

- **Non-judgmental** – Try to be impartial and just see things as facts, rather than judging them as good or bad.
- **Acceptance** – Accept things as they are; don't try to change anything.
- **Non-striving** – In mindfulness, try not to be goal oriented and avoid being attached to the outcome.
- **Curiosity** – Be interested in the experience at hand. What are its sensory qualities? Be a detective and gather as much data about your experience as possible.

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How to practice mindfulness

Mindfulness can fit in to your life in many different ways. As mentioned above, formal practices such as yoga and meditation are great ways to work on mindfulness**.** These can be sought out by finding a local class with an experienced teacher or by using a podcast, video, or app, of which there are plenty to choose from.

There are also many informal ways you can foster mindfulness, by bringing focused and curious attention to things you already do. Here are some examples of things you do that you could do more mindfully:

- **Mindful walking** – When you go for a walk or walk from one place to another, pay attention to each step and how the rhythm of walking feels in your body. Look at your surroundings and try to notice things you might not otherwise see. Rather than thinking about the place you just left or your destination, focus on the walk itself.
- **Mindful eating** – Often when we eat we are glued to our smart phones, watching TV or locked into a conversation. Choose one meal a day to eat mindfully – breakfast is a good choice for a lot of people. When you eat mindfully, chew slowly and pay attention to the flavors and textures.
- **Mindful breathing –** Take a few moments each day to practice mindful breathing. Focus on each breath, on the sensations in your nose and throat and how the air fills and empties out of your lungs and abdomen.
- **Unplug** – Take time away from your phone and the computer and do something you enjoy and do it mindfully.

Once you have incorporated mindfulness into your own life, you might want to encourage those around you to do things more mindfully as well. Maybe your family can have mindful dinners one night a week or you and your friends can go for regular mindful walks. Maybe you can invent new ways to be mindful — that is what is so incredible about the practice, it can be applied to just about anything!