



island health

Geriatric Specialty Services

Mindfulness Exercises

The practice of **mindfulness** can bring many benefits to your emotional and physical health, as well as to the relationships in your life. Mindfulness is an amazing tool for stress management and overall wellness because it can be used at virtually any time and can quickly bring lasting results. The following mindfulness exercises are simple and convenient, and can lead you to a deeper experience of mindfulness in your daily life.

Mindfulness Exercise # 1: Meditation

Meditation brings many benefits in its own right, and has been one of the most popular and traditional ways to achieve mindfulness for centuries, so it tops the list of mindfulness exercises. Meditation becomes easier with practice, but it need not be difficult for beginners. Simply find a comfortable place, free of distractions, and quiet your mind.

Mindfulness Exercise #2: Deep Breathing

Mindfulness can be as simple as breathing! One of the simplest ways to experience mindfulness, which can be done as you go about your daily activities (convenient for those who feel they don't have time to meditate), is to focus on your breathing. Breathe from your belly rather than from your chest, and try to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Focusing on the sound and rhythm of your breath, especially when you are upset, can have a calming effect and help you stay grounded in the present moment.

Mindfulness Exercise #3: Listening to Music

Listening to music has many benefits - so many, in fact, that music is being used therapeutically in a new branch of complementary medicine known as music therapy. That is part of why listening to music makes a great mindfulness exercise. You can play soothing new-age music, classical music or another type of slow-tempo music to feel calming effects. Make it an exercise in mindfulness by really focusing on the sound and vibration of each note, the feelings that the music brings up within you, and other sensations that are happening as you listen. If other thoughts creep into your head, congratulate yourself for noticing, and gently bring your attention back to the current moment and the music you are hearing.

Mindfulness Exercise #4: Cleaning House

The term "cleaning house" has a literal meaning (cleaning up your actual house) as well as a figurative one (getting rid of "emotional baggage", letting go of things that no longer serve you), and both can be great stress relievers! Because clutter has several hidden costs and can be a subtle but significant stressor, cleaning house and de-cluttering as a mindfulness exercise can bring lasting benefits. To bring mindfulness to cleaning, view it as a positive event, an exercise in self-understanding and stress relief, rather than simply as a chore. Then, as you clean, focus on what you are doing as you are doing it - and nothing else. Feel the warm, soapy water on your hands as you wash dishes; experience the vibrations of the vacuum cleaner as you cover the area of the floor; enjoy the warmth of the laundry as you fold it; feel the freedom of letting go of unneeded objects as you put them in the donations bag. It may sound silly, but if you approach cleaning as an exercise in mindfulness, it can become one. (It is also recommended to add music to the exercise)

Mindfulness Exercise # 5: Observing Your Thoughts

Many stressed and busy people find it difficult to stop focusing on the rapid stream of thoughts running through their mind, and the idea of sitting in meditation and holding off the onslaught of thought can actually cause more stress. If this sounds like you, the mindfulness exercise of observing your thoughts might be for you. Rather than working against the voice in your head, sit back and "observe" your thoughts, rather than becoming involved in them. As you observe them, you might find your mind quieting, and the thoughts becoming less stressful. (If not, you may benefit from journaling as a way of processing all those thoughts so you can decrease their intensity and try again.)

Mindfulness Exercise #6: Create Your Own!

You are probably getting the idea that virtually any activity can be a mindfulness exercise. It helps to practice meditation or another exercise that really focuses on mindfulness, but you can bring mindfulness to anything you do. You will find yourself less stressed and more grounded in the process.