



# Everyday Mindfulness Exercises



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# What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is being in the moment, not being distracted by external influences or even your own thoughts and feelings. It's derived from meditation and yoga, where being calm, focused, and in the moment are key parts of their philosophies.

By practicing mindfulness on a daily basis, we become more aware of our:

<b>Thoughts:</b>	"I can never do this"
<b>Feelings:</b>	sadness, hopelessness
<b>Behaviours:</b>	withdrawing, procrastinating
<b>Physiology:</b>	muscle tension, headaches

Being mindful allows us to be more present in the moment. With practice, you can learn to catch your thoughts and feelings before they begin to influence your behaviour. The more you incorporate mindfulness into your daily life, the better at being in the moment you will be. This will make it easier for you to increase your ability to focus on tasks and ignore distractions.

This booklet is full of mindfulness exercises and information that you can use in your everyday life. Each exercise has a beginner and an intermediate exercise level accompanied by an example. Simply practice each beginner exercise before moving on to the intermediate version.

# 1. Touch Exercises

## *Beginner*

Find a quiet place where you feel safe, comfortable and are free from distractions. Pick up a bag that contains a few items, close your eyes and begin to feel through it. When you select an item, hold it in both hands and run your fingers along it. Notice how it feels, the temperature, texture and if it is hard or soft.

Each time you feel your thoughts drifting from the item in your hands simply acknowledge the distraction and refocus.

When you have explored the item fully, place it next to you and select something else from your bag.

Continue to do this until your bag is empty then open your eyes.



## *Intermediate*

Sit down at a park, café or the library. Have something that you can hold in your hands like a book, brush, or pencil case. Close your eyes and run your fingers over the item, paying close attention to what you are feeling through your fingers.

Each time you notice your thoughts drifting from the item in your hands simply acknowledge that your mind wandered for a moment and refocus on what you have in your hands. Do this for a minute then open your eyes.

### **Example**

I am sitting on the bus on my way to class before my exam. In my lap I have my backpack. I close my eyes and feel the different textures of my backpack, noticing the zippers, straps and material surfaces.

As I run my fingers along the buckle, I notice the conversation that the passengers in front of me are having. I acknowledge that my thoughts drifted then refocus on what I am feeling.

While feeling the texture of my bag, I think about my upcoming exam. Before my mind can think on it further, I go back to focusing on the material of my bag.



## 2. Sight Exercises

### *Beginner*

Find a calming place to sit down. Close your eyes and take five breaths in and out. Then open your eyes and pay attention to the first thing that you see. Try not to read any words, instead look at the shape, size and colour of the letters.

If a thought or feeling comes into your head, acknowledge it but let it float by, like a leaf in a stream. If you notice that you are focusing on your thoughts instead of what you're seeing close your eyes and start again, this time focusing on something else.

Repeat this as many times as you need until you feel calm.

## *Intermediate*

Choose a location that has different scenery and possible distractions. Repeat the exercise as before, but try to focus in on the first thing you see and close off any other distractions.

Each time something distracts you, take note of it then refocus on what you saw first. This will be harder to do, but with practice, you will learn to maintain your focus around sights, smells and sounds that would usually distract you.

### **Example**

I am sitting outside the lecture room before an exam. I close my eyes and take a slow breath in and out as I count to five. When I open my eyes, I see a notice board across the hall on the opposite wall.

It has long, straight, shiny edges that are bright red. It is so shiny that there are slight reflections on the surface, like images dancing across it.

Someone walks past and breaks my focus. I close my eyes, taking slow breaths and count to five again. I open them to see a piece of paper on the notice board. It is white, with various marks in black. There is an image that is in different tones of black and grey. Someone walks past, but I hardly notice, the shapes on the paper have my attention.

## 3. Sound Exercises

### *Beginner*

Find a quiet place where you feel safe and comfortable. You can either sit or lie down while doing this exercise. Close your eyes and rest your hands by your sides, but do not have anything touching your fingertips.

Take a slow breath in. As you do, notice the first sound that you hear. Pay attention to its direction, duration, pitch and tone. If it stops, notice its passing, but try not to dwell on it any further. If any thoughts or feelings come from hearing the sound, acknowledge them and let them pass, just as the sound did.

Take another slow breath in and focus on the next sound you hear. If you find that your mind is wandering, try lying down or turning the lights off.

Keep practicing until you notice sounds passing by without thinking any more about them, like leaves floating down a stream.





## *Intermediate*

In a busier and noisier location, take a slow breath with your eyes closed. As you breathe in, notice the sounds that are around you. Pay attention to the difference between the sounds coming from people, vehicles, animals and machinery.

As you hear a new sound, identify where it came from then let it pass. Keep noticing sounds around you; the direction they come from, how loud they are and the possible distance between you and the source of the sound.

If you hear words, do not focus on what is being said, just that they are being spoken and are passing you by.

### **Example**

I am sitting on the bench outside the lecture theatre. I close my eyes and take some slow breaths in and out. I hear someone approaching, from the clip clop sound that they make. I realise that the sound is coming closer and then begins to fade.

I notice the muffled sound of chatter in the lecture theatre. There are different voices, some of them higher than the others.

I continue to breathe in and out, taking in the sounds around me but not letting them change the way I think and feel.



## 4. Smell Exercises

### *Beginner*

Make yourself a cup of tea, coffee or hot chocolate. Sit down in your favourite place at home where you feel calm and are free from distractions.

Bring your cup up under your nose and take a nice slow breath in. Notice the different smells and sensations as you breathe in. Think about the different elements that make up that smell. Is the scent sweet, savoury, spicy or even smooth?

Keep taking nice even breaths in and out, focusing on any new smells that you get from your drink. Once you've taken the time to explore, take a sip, you deserve it.



## *Intermediate*

The next time you order a drink on campus, take a moment to step aside and complete this exercise. As you breathe in focus on what you can smell, acknowledge anything that may be distracting you, but do not let them take your thoughts away from your drink.

Notice how you feel as you continue to breathe in and smell your drink. Keep your body as relaxed as possible while breathing in. Focus on how you are feeling at this moment.

If anything does distract you it's okay, just let the distraction pass you by and continue to experience your drink.

### **Example**

After waiting in line for 5 minutes and another 10 minutes while my coffee was made, I was feeling a little stressed.

I step outside and off the path. I close my eyes, holding my drink up under my nose and breathe in. I notice that my coffee smells strong, almost bitter at first. It is like really dark chocolate with some spices added. My nose tingles as I breathe in and I realise that there is a slight fruity hint at the end. It is subtle and I could have missed it.

Someone says something near me, I acknowledge the sound and take another breath in before taking a sip.

# 5. Taste Exercises

## *Beginner*

Find a quiet time to enjoy a yummy meal at home alone. Put your phone away, turn off the TV, computer or any music that's playing. Eat slowly, take your time and enjoy every mouthful. Take one bite at a time, noticing the different tastes and textures of each bite. Pay attention to how it feels in your mouth and the different flavours and textures that you can identify.

If a thought, feeling or memory comes along, notice it and then focus again on eating your meal. Take your time and aim to experience as many aspects of the meal as possible.



## *Intermediate*

Try sitting and eating a meal in a busy place now that you have practiced at home. Focus on your meal, paying close attention to the different flavours that you are tasting.

Notice each time you are distracted by someone else, when a thought enters your mind, or you feel something, then refocus on your food.

Notice the way that the flavours taste in your mouth and use new flavours to bring your thoughts back to what you are eating.

### **Example**

Sitting outside for lunch today, I have a ham and salad sandwich. As I take my first bite, I pay attention to the first flavour that touches my tongue.

As I chew, I notice the different textures and the way they feel. As I chew my food, I hear the sounds that are made and taste the new flavours that develop.

A group of people walk past talking. I notice this, but close my eyes and take another bite of my sandwich. I can taste mayonnaise this time. The texture is different on my tongue and as I chew it does not have the same crunch.

# Other Mindfulness Resources



## FREE APPS

### **Stop, Breathe & Think**

Create a force field of calm around you and track your progress with 16 free guided meditations. Use Stop, Breath & Think at home on a regular basis to build your skills and live more mindfully.

### **Calm: Meditate & Relax With Guided Mindfulness**

This app is perfect for student life. Use it before an exam or in preparation for a presentation.

Select a background screen and noise that you feel connected with, like a lake, waves at a beach or rain on leaves. Then make time to listen to the sounds on your phone.

## MINDFULNESS PROGRAMS HERE AT UQ

### **Mindfulness Yoga Program – Student Services**

This group program integrates the practices of yoga with mindfulness meditation techniques to support greater resilience to stress and improve well-being. Beginners are welcome.

Register your interest via [www.uq.edu.au/student-services](http://www.uq.edu.au/student-services)

### **UQ Yoga and Meditation Club (UQYMC)**

A non-denominational community of spirit-stoked yogis and yoginis who believe in the principle of 'harmony in diversity'. They run free weekly yoga and meditation sessions at the UQ St Lucia campus.

Visit them on [Facebook/UQYMC](https://www.facebook.com/UQYMC)



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