

# Mindfulness and Relaxation

When a person is confronted with anxiety it's common to experience a fight-or-flight response, a "blank" mind, increased heart rate, sweating, tense muscles, and more. Moment-by-moment awareness of our surrounding environment is a practice that helps us better cope with the difficult thoughts and feelings that cause us stress and anxiety in everyday life.

Rather than being led on auto-pilot by emotions influenced by negative past experiences and fears of future occurrences, mindfulness allows us to ground the mind in the present moment and deal with challenges in a clear-minded, calm way. Mindfulness helps free us from the restriction of unhelpful, self-limiting thought patterns and enables us to be fully present to focus on positive emotions.

*Breathing in confidence, breathing out, letting be.* Mindfulness is acceptance of what is happening while reaffirming one's ability to cope confidently.

## Deep Breathing

It's natural to take long, deep breaths, when relaxed. However, during the fight-or-flight response, breathing becomes rapid and shallow. Deep breathing reverses that and sends messages to the brain to begin calming the body. Practice will make your body respond more efficiently to nervous breathing in the future.

What to do with the thoughts that come up:

Imagine a stream with leaves floating down. As thoughts appear, place them on the leaves and let them float past. You are looking AT your thoughts instead of through your thoughts. Instead of being entangled in these thoughts, you see them simply as they are: pictures, words, and sounds.

## **Incorporating Mindfulness in Your Week**

### 1. Mindful Breathing

Take one minute to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.

### 2. Mindful Observation

Choose something from your environment that you easily miss when rushing and focus on it for a minute or two.

### 3. Mindful Awareness

Choose something that occurs during your day more than once, like opening a door, starting a computer, or smelling food you're about to eat. Take a moment to think about what you are doing, where it will lead you, and gain a better

appreciation for its purpose. It could also be a thought- 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. Instead of going through your daily motions on autopilot, take occasional moments to stop and give your actions awareness and purpose.

#### 4. Mindful Listening

So much of what we see and hear on a daily basis is influenced by our past experiences, but when we listen mindfully, we achieve a neutral, present awareness that lets us listen without preconception. Select a song you have never heard before, close your eyes and put on headphones. The idea is to just listen, to become fully engaged in the composition without judgement.

#### 5. Mindful Immersion

Rather than anxiously wanting to finish an everyday routine task in order to get on with doing something else, take that regular routine and fully experience it like never before. For example, if you are cleaning your house, pay attention to every detail of the activity. Feel and become the motion when sweeping the floor, sense the muscles you use when scrubbing the dishes, develop a more efficient way of wiping the windows clean. The idea is to get creative and discover new experiences within a familiar routine task. fully immerse yourself in the process.

#### 6. Mindful Appreciation

Notice 5 things in your day that usually go unappreciated. Give thanks and appreciate the seemingly insignificant things in life; the things that support our existence but rarely get a second thought amidst our desire for bigger and better things. For example, your clothes that provide warmth, the electricity that gives you light, the mailman that delivers your mail. Find out everything you can about their creation and purpose to appreciate their role in your life.