

Information handout

UK English

# What Is Mindfulness?



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## Description

Mindfulness describes the practice of mindfulness meditation. This is a form of self-awareness training adapted from the Buddhist practice of mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness is about being aware of what is happening in the present, moment-by-moment, without making judgments about what we notice. Mindfulness meditation practice is a key ingredient in a variety of evidence-based psychotherapies, including dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). Mindfulness has been demonstrated to help a wide variety of conditions including feeling-states such as anxiety and depression, and physical conditions such as chronic pain or illness. Some of the strongest evidence for its clinical use is in the area of preventing relapse from depression. This information sheet contains a simple introduction to mindfulness and is further illustrated by a number of helpful quotations.

## Instructions

This is a Psychology Tools information handout. Suggested uses include:

- Client handout – a psychoeducation resource.
- Discussion point – to provoke a discussion and explore your client's beliefs.
- Therapist learning tool – to improve your familiarity with a psychological construct.
- Supervision tool – to develop formulations and knowledge.
- Teaching resource – a learning tool during training.

## References

Baer, R. A. (2003). Mindfulness training as a clinical intervention: A conceptual and empirical review. *Clinical psychology: Science and Practice*, 10(2), 125-143.

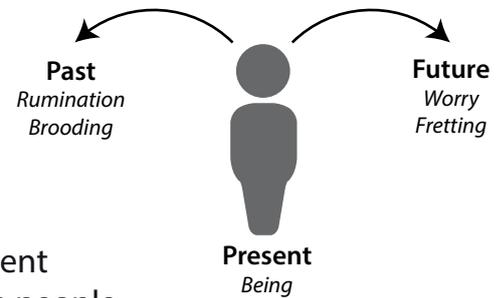
Kuyken, W., Warren, F. C., Taylor, R. S., Whalley, B., Crane, C., Bondolfi, G., ... & Segal, Z. (2016). Efficacy of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy in prevention of depressive relapse: an individual patient data meta-analysis from randomized trials. *JAMA Psychiatry*, 73(6), 565-574.

## What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the short term for *mindfulness meditation practice*. This is a form of self-awareness training adapted from Buddhist mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness is about being aware of what is happening in the present, moment-by-moment, without making judgments about what we notice. Mindfulness meditation practice is a key ingredient in a variety of evidence-based psychotherapies, including dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT).

### Why should I practice mindfulness?

Our minds can be focused on things in the past, present or future. We often find ourselves ruminating about things that have already happened, or worrying about things that could happen. This can often be distressing.



Mindfulness is a practice which encourages us to attend to the present moment. There is good evidence that mindfulness practice can help people cope with a wide variety of feeling-states such as depression and anxiety, but also physical health conditions including pain and chronic illness.

### Why do I need to practise? Can't I pay attention to the present moment already?

We can all pay attention to the present moment, at least for a short while. If you haven't tried meditation before though, you might notice that your attention wanders and is not easily controlled. Mindfulness strengthens our ability to pay attention in the present moment, but also increases our awareness of how our minds fluctuate, often in unhelpful ways. People who practise mindfulness regularly find that it helps their ability to stay in the present moment without being deflected.

### What does it mean to 'cultivate a non-judgmental attitude'?

Shakespeare said "there is nothing is either good or bad, but thinking makes it so", and this is a core idea in therapies like cognitive behavioural therapy. Making judgments about our own experiences can often lead to us becoming quite distressed. For example, thoughts like "this is horrible" and "I can't take any more" are both judgments associated with distress. Practising mindfulness teaches us to accept more of our experience without judging it. This has been shown to help people live more fulfilling lives.

### What expert practitioners have said about mindfulness

*"If you let cloudy water settle, it will become clear. If you let your upset mind settle, your course will also become clear."*

- Jack Kornfield, Buddha's Little Instruction Book (1994)

*"Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally."*

- John Kabat-Zinn, Wherever You Go, There You Are (1994)

*"The non-judgmental observation of the ongoing stream of internal and external stimuli as they arise."*

- Ruth Baer, Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice (2003)

*"Keeping one's consciousness alive to the present reality."*

- Thich Nath Hanh, The Miracle of Mindfulness (1975)

*"Mindfulness is simply the knack of noticing without comment whatever is happening in your present experience."*

- Guy Claxton, The Heart of Buddhism (1990)

## Resource details

Title: What Is Mindfulness?

Language: English (GB)

Translated title: What Is Mindfulness?

Type: Information handout

Document orientation: Portrait

URL: <https://www.psychologytools.com/resource/what-is-mindfulness/>

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