

Thirty-One Simple Mindfulness Practices

You can learn to be open to what life presents you in the moment without having to make a judgment or run away from the situation. There is plenty of research showing that when individuals make mindfulness practice a part of their daily routine, they strengthen their overall well-being.

An essential benefit of mindfulness is the ability to increase self-awareness. This enables us to respond to life events with less rigidity. As you make a habit of practicing mindfulness every day, you may start to notice an improvement in your relationships. If you are a student, your ability to focus will increase. You will develop more patience and compassion toward yourself and others. Mindfulness can bring you a sense of peace even when challenges are present. It can enable you to become unstuck from the past and future.

Just keep in mind that mindfulness requires patience and practice. Don't fret over it. Take a few moments and practice one of these exercises each day, savoring each one of them, then choose your favorites and do them as often as you'd like. Enjoy!

1. **Eye to eye**

Connect with a loved one (spouse, partner, parent, child, sibling, friend) by looking into each other's eyes for three to five minutes. Send a message of love with your eyes. When the mind starts putting in its two cents, acknowledge it and gently get back to connecting with your loved one by looking into each other's eyes a few minutes longer.

2. **Anchoring on your pet**

If you have a pet, connect with your pet by using your sense of sight and touch twice a day. When your mind starts distracting you, acknowledge and thank it, then return to connecting with your pet by using those two senses.

3. **The night sounds**

When you lie down in bed for the night, find a sound (e.g., furnace and air conditioner) and focus on it before going to sleep. Immerse yourself in the sound. When the mind starts its chatter, gently acknowledge it and return your focus to the sound. Continue anchoring on the sound you chose, and acknowledging the mind as needed until you fall asleep.

4. **Admiring a starry night**

On a clear night, go outside and notice the light being emitted from the stars. What do you see? How do you feel? What's your mind saying? See if you can experience the starlit night with your sight and notice how your body feels as you do. When the mind interrupts your experience, gently acknowledge it and return to noticing the beauty of the night.

5. **Listening to your mind with empathy**

When things don't go as expected during the day, take a moment to notice what your friend the mind is saying. Take a step back. Allow it to talk as you take the stance of a caring friend listening with empathy.

Listen to your mind with the compassion you would show a friend who's lost their way, then gently shift back to the present moment.

6. Waking up and noticing your body

When you are waking up, notice your body and the space around it. Slowly trace your body. What do you feel around your face, arms, hands, legs, and feet? When your mind starts talking, acknowledge it with "I hear you," then go back to noticing your body in relation to the space around it for a few more minutes before opening your eyes and getting up.

7. Are you here or there?

When you regret something you did and your mind starts giving you advice, respond with "Am I here or there?" meaning "Am I here now or in the past?" Then say, "I can choose to be here," and gently refocus on here and attend to the task at hand. The mind will most likely keep trying to pull you back to the past. Gently respond with "I'm here, not there."

8. Palm breathing

You can take three to five minutes for this practice. Close your eyes and place your hands on your lap, palms facing up. As you inhale, imagine that the air is slowly coming in through your hands and going all the way to your lungs. As you exhale, imagine the air flowing out from your lungs, through your arms, and leaving from the palms of your hands. Continue breathing in and out through the palms of your hands. When your mind starts talking as usual, acknowledge it and gently go back to palm breathing. Repeat until the alarm goes off.

9. The beauty of the earth

Take a break from work and daily chores to go on a nature walk. Notice your surroundings until you find a small object, like a blade of grass, a leaf, a flower, a rock, etc. Take a moment to appreciate it. Notice the details and carefully examine it with your four senses. Describe it silently, noticing it as if it's the first time you've seen this object. Soon enough, your mind will bring up different ideas and themes. The thoughts may be random and neutral. Sometimes they may be thoughts that get you stuck and lead you to ruminate. Your task is to catch yourself getting stuck. As soon as you become aware this has happened, gently bring yourself back to the object you chose to focus on. Remember, when you practice being mindful, your awareness will increase and you'll be able to decide whether the thought is worth entertaining or not.

10. Mindfully doing annoying tasks

Do a chore you don't like, and as you do it, notice your thoughts and feelings. Acknowledge them and allow them as you focus on the task, even though it may be unpleasant. Remember, the task and your internal events will pass, so allow them to be present now.

11. Fingertips

Join your hands so that the fingertips of your left hand touch the fingertips of your right hand. Notice how that feels, then take a moment to press only your thumbs against each other while the other fingers touch lightly. Notice how that feels. Move to your pointer fingers and press them against each other while the others gently touch. Continue with the middle fingers, pressing them against each other and just noticing. Proceed with the ring and pinky fingers, then repeat the same actions as you reverse back to your thumbs. As you press against each finger, notice the sensations. Defuse from the mind as needed and continue to anchor on noticing how the tips of your fingers feel in this moment.

12. Hands and finger breathing

Breathe in and exhale slowly for a few seconds, then proceed to take a deep breath as you trace your thumb with your other hand's pointer finger. Hold your breath, then slowly breathe out as you trace it back. Proceed to trace your index finger as you slowly inhale. Hold your breath, then trace it back as you exhale. Continue to do so with the rest of your fingers, breathing in as you trace one finger, pause for a second, and then exhale as you trace each finger back. Remember to take your time to inhale deeply and exhale slowly to prevent shallow breathing and hyperventilating. As usual, notice when your mind distracts you. Acknowledge and defuse, then gently go back to the practice.

13. "Hello, old friend!"

When anxiety (or another emotion) shows up, start noticing the way you are breathing. As you breathe in, say, "Hello, anxiety!" (Don't be surprised your old friend has come back.) As you exhale, say, "My old friend." Continue to breathe in, "Hello anxiety," then exhale, "My old friend."

14. "Hello, anxiety. Goodbye struggle."

This exercise is similar to the one above. However, it is mentioned because your mind will want you to immediately fight it. Thus, when you notice anxiety or another emotion you wish you didn't have in this moment, take a deep breath and say, "Hello, anxiety (or other emotion). Then slowly exhale, saying, "Goodbye struggle" to help you remember you can let go of the struggle or fight with the emotion. You can allow and notice the feeling in this moment.

15. Shifting focus from unpleasant to pleasant sensations and back

Pain and joy; despair and hope. You may want joy yet experience pain. You may be feeling despair but wish you could have hope. Is it possible that when you feel despair, you can also find hope? Your focus may be on despair and wanting to get rid of the unpleasant sensation related to the strong emotion you are feeling. Could you allow it to be there as you notice hope in your body? Can you make room for both? You can do it as you scan your body and find where the sensation related to your feeling is located. Begin to take slow, deep breaths, and as you exhale, breathe into the part of your body where the unpleasant sensation is found. Breathe in and breathe out to create space for it. Continue to breathe in and around this unpleasant sensation for a minute, then scan your body and see if you can find the sensation related to the other emotion (e.g., hope, joy, peace) that may have been buried because your focus has been only on the unpleasant one. Take slow deep breaths, and as you exhale, expand the space found there. Continue to create space for the sensation that seemed absent. It just needs space. Continue to breathe in and around it for a few more seconds, then gently shift back to the uncomfortable sensation and repeat as instructed above. Alternate between both sensations for a few more minutes. Can both sensations be there? Can you create space for both of them and move on with your day—doing what matters?

16. Mindful and grateful

At the end of the day, take one minute to list three things you're grateful for. Sit comfortably on your bed or couch and breathe in through your nose and then out through your nose. Now, think of three simple things you are grateful for. What difference did they make in your day and why? Notice one thing at a time and what feelings show up as you feel gratitude for each thing, then go on to the next thing you are grateful for, and so on, as you continue to also notice your breath. Ponder how that simple thing made a positive difference in your day.

17. Mindfully notice your actions

Every day, take at least thirty seconds to mindfully notice your actions. Narrate your actions and notice, really notice, what you are doing by narrating the task for a few seconds, then notice what you can appreciate about this moment.

18. Say yes as you lie down to sleep

When going to bed and your mind keeps talking, choose where to anchor your attention (e.g., your breathing, sounds) and focus on that. Soon enough, your mind will take your attention off your breathing. Notice that disruption and simply say yes to whatever the mind says. Gently return to noticing your breath. Continue to just say yes to the mind until you fall asleep. If you don't fall asleep, that's okay. At least you're learning not to engage in conversation with your mind.

19. Waking up from pleasant and unpleasant dreams

When you happen to wake up in the middle of the night and want to analyze your dreams whether they were pleasant or not, remember, dreams are just like thoughts—they don't have meaning until you decide to give them meaning. They are jumbled-up ideas. Sometimes they may relate to our daily lives and the stress we have been experiencing, but they don't need to be reviewed or obsessed over. Your mind has just done that! No need to lose precious sleep trying to figure out what they mean. Choose where to anchor (e.g., sounds, breath, backs of your eyelids); then, when your mind urges you to review and analyze your dream, just say, "I know" and go back to anchoring on your breath. Anchor on your breath instead of becoming distracted by your mind.

20. Like a feather in the breeze

When you go to bed, lie on your back, extend your arms and feet, and close your eyes. Imagine slowly tracing your body starting from the top of your head and going all the way to your feet. As you slowly trace your body, notice how that area of your body feels in this moment. Once you have traced your body, imagine your body as light as a feather in the breeze. Extend your arms and feet. Feel like a weightless feather in the wind a few more seconds—or minutes, if you'd like. Acknowledge the mind as needed and gently go back to embodying a feather in the breeze. Enjoy!

21. People watching

When you are in a public setting, consciously find a place to sit or stand and watch the people around you for a few minutes. Allow the observing part of you to notice, then notice what you notice. Look at people as if they are part of a masterpiece painting. Deliberately observe the shapes, colors, tones, lines, space, sizes, directions, and movements of people. Notice and admire their beauty. Be aware of the chattering mind. Briefly acknowledge it, then go gently back to abstractly noticing and being in the moment of your awareness.

22. Vocalizing your thoughts

When you are at home, in the shower, or driving alone, make a point to vocalize your thoughts for one to three minutes. Your mind will distract you as usual. No worries. Shift back to vocalizing. How quickly does your mind begin to distract you? Discover what happens as you practice this simple exercise every day.

23. Naming your emotions

You may want to set your alarm to go off three times a day so you can remember to check in with your emotions. Notice how you are feeling and name the feeling you are experiencing in that moment: “I’m noticing frustration right now. I’m noticing guilt.” Then go back to your daily tasks.

24. Doodling to your favorite song

Find a piece of paper, turn on your favorite song, and begin doodling. Create curved or straight lines or any other shapes you feel like scribbling and drawing. There is no right or wrong way to do this practice. Just let your hand doodle away until you have covered the paper to your satisfaction. If you think you cannot set aside time for this practice, just doodle when you are on the phone or at a boring meeting. Doodle anywhere, anytime! Doodle often enough to discover the magic of doodling!

25. Writing your thoughts

Take three to five minutes to just write whatever thoughts come to your awareness in the moment. Don’t try to think of something to write about. Soon enough, the mind will start talking. Of course, your mind will be talking faster than you can write. Just listen and write what you can. Watch out for the urge to argue or converse with the mind. Just write and notice. No need to read what you’ve written. They are just words that showed up, and now they are gone! They may come back. Just notice and write them again as an observer.

26. Foot massaging

You’ll need a 2.25-diameter rubber ball or tennis ball. As you sit at your desk, place it on the floor and press your foot on it. Roll it back and forth with your foot for about two minutes. Notice how the ball feels against the sole of your foot, then repeat with your other foot. Enjoy!

27. Connecting to your heart for two minutes

Set your smartphone’s alarm to remind you to take a one to two-minute break to connect with your heart. Find a quiet place, sit comfortably, and close your eyes if it’s comfortable for you. Place your hand on your heart and notice your heartbeat. Anchor your focus on the heartbeat so that when your mind starts a conversation, you can just acknowledge it and refocus on your amazing heart!

28. Mindful word

As you are getting ready for the day, take a moment to choose a word that will help you remember to stay mindful during the day, like *breathe*, *feel*, *notice*, *awareness*, *touch*, *senses*, *ocean*, *sky*, or *time*. There is no right or wrong word. The word you choose is the word that will help you remember. You may want to place it on your smartphone screen, or email or text it to yourself.

29. Ujjayi breath

This is a basic breath in yoga. Find a place where you can sit comfortably. Close your eyes if you’d like, then start noticing the way you are breathing in this moment without any extra effort. Do so for a few seconds, then take a nice deep breath through your nose and slowly exhale through your mouth. As you breathe out, see if you can make a soft, long “ha” sound, as if you were fogging up a mirror. Repeat a few times to feel comfortable with the breath. Do this for a minute or two. This breath can also sound like the ocean. You can imagine ocean waves as you breathe in through your nose and slowly breath out through your mouth, making the “ha” sound. Notice how you feel after practicing this yoga breath. Did it help you stay anchored when your mind began to distract you?

30. Lion’s breath

When you've had a long or frustrating day, try the lion's breath! Sit in a comfortable position noticing your breath for a few moments. Take a couple of deep breaths. Now you are ready to inhale deeply through your nose. As you exhale, open your eyes wide, looking up between your eyebrows. Exhale through your mouth and stick your tongue out as far as you can and make a "ha" sound. This is the lion's breath, so make that exhale sound like a lion is exhaling—louder, deeper, and longer than the ujjayi breath. Inhale through your nose, look up between your eyes, and exhale a long, deep, loud "ha" sound again. Repeat a few times. Have fun!

31. Taking a different perspective

This practice can be more effective if you record it on your phone or read it several times before proceeding. Find a comfortable place to sit or lie down, then close your eyes if that's comfortable for you. Begin by noticing the air coming in from your nose and flowing out of your nose for a few seconds. Now, take a few deep breaths, making sure to do so slowly and mindfully, and imagine what it would be like to be a cat. Yes, a cat. This may be a creature you have strong or neutral feelings about, and that's okay. Notice your thoughts and feelings, then go ahead and "feel" like a cat. What is it like for you in this moment? When ready, gently shift your attention and imagine being the opposite gender and be aware of the similarities and differences. What is it like for you to embody a different gender in this moment? Notice your experience a moment longer. Now, gently shift your focus and imagine being a young child. What does it feel like to be a child right now? Observe your emotions and your mind's comments a few more seconds as you embody this child, then gently shift your focus to picture yourself being in your eighties, nineties, or even over one hundred years old. What shows up for you as you visualize yourself as this older person? Take a few more seconds to notice. When you are ready, gently shift your attention back to your breath. Noticing the air coming in and out of your nose for a few more seconds. When you are ready, open your eyes. Take a moment to ponder the experience.

I hope some of these exercises resonate with you and that you will incorporate them into your daily routine.