

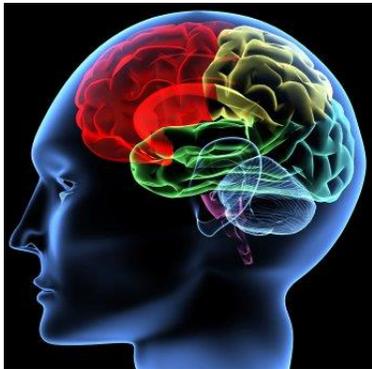
# DEALING WITH **STRESS** THROUGH



Wherever or whoever we turn to these days, we hear about how stress is overwhelmingly taking over our lives.

Whether it is short-term stressors such as an upcoming exam or a looming work deadline or more traumatic experiences such as going through a divorce, losing a loved one, or experiencing unemployment, stress is increasingly becoming one of the most common life challenges from which one suffers. While short-term stress can have some positive effects, such as boosting memory or sharpening focus when preparing for an exam, it also appears to negatively impact our physical, mental, and emotional health when experienced over longer periods of time. In fact, stress has even been linked to heart disease and can exacerbate conditions such as coronary artery disease.

## Mindfulness



A practice that is becoming known as an antidote to stress is mindfulness, which is central to Buddhism and other spiritual traditions. Mindfulness involves being conscious of the present moment, including whatever one is experiencing in that present moment (i.e. in the body or the mind), without placing any judgements as well as without projecting oneself into the past or future.

Mindfulness is similarly associated with reductions in neural activity and gray matter in the amygdala, a part of the brain often linked to the fight-or-flight response, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

### What are the benefits of mindfulness practice?

While it may have originated as a spiritual practice, many scientists and researchers now agree that mindfulness can be used as a way of treating stress and other health issues that may result from stress.

- In a recent study published in 2015, researchers in Taiwan surveyed the impact of an 8-week mindfulness training program on 3,270 factory workers with high levels of psychological distress. The meditation group reported **feeling less stressed, anxious, and depressed as well as a reduction in physical symptoms such as fatigue, aches, and pain** after participating in the program.
- Scientists have also recorded benefits in work performance: a 2014 study at the Dow Chemical Company found that mindfulness training had **increased resiliency, energy, and lowered stress in employees**.
- Moreover, mindfulness can help one deal with the more severe kind of challenges or adversities. For those individuals who have undergone trauma, long-term practice of mindfulness can help **deal with difficult memories or traumatic flashbacks by anchoring one in the present**.

## How to practice mindfulness

Mindfulness can often conjure images of a person sitting in a peaceful setting—preferably a tropical paradise—meditating for several hours at a time. While this might seem like an attractive prospect to some, the idea of meditation can also deter people from practicing mindfulness and keep them from enjoying the fruits of this practice. In this newsletter, we will share some simple strategies for integrating mindfulness in your daily life.



### Using breath as an anchor:

Focus on the sensation of your breath moving in and out of your lungs. One of the greatest things about this exercise is that it can be done anytime and anywhere. Whenever you find yourself—or more specifically, your mind—dropping into worry mode, just bring your attention to the sensation of your breath. Continue focusing on the breath until you feel relaxed.

### The “Body Scan” exercise:

Dr. Marlynn Wei, a blogger for Harvard Health Publications, recommends the Body Scan exercise. To practice this exercise, sit in a comfortable **posture or lie down**. **Close your eyes** and focus on the breath. Start off by focusing your attention on your feet. Feel any sensation including pain or discomfort that you may be experiencing in your feet. Gradually move your attention upwards (towards your shins and knees, thighs and hips, stomach and lower back, chest and upper back, neck and shoulders, and lastly your head) while noticing the sensations in each section of the body. Bring your attention back to your breath and then gently open your eyes.

### Integrating mindfulness in your daily activities:

Pick an every-day activity or activities (such as eating a meal, walking, showering) and try to do it as mindfully as possible. The idea is to focus your attention completely on the sensation, sights, and sounds that occur during the activity instead of checking your smartphone or thinking about the myriad of things that are on your to-do list.



The key to mindfulness practice is to be patient and practice self-care. It is easy and often common to feel frustrated when starting a new practice, but it is also important to remember that it is not possible or even necessary to master mindfulness from the start. Instead, use the emotions that arise during the mindfulness exercise as a means to be more conscious of what you are feeling in the present moment.

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