

Be Where You Are

After you've read through the following script a few times, close your eyes, and follow the instructions given. If you are comfortable with this, have someone close to you read the script aloud while you do the exercise. You can also record these instructions on a device and play it back to yourself while you practice. Remember not to panic if you become distracted while doing this exercise. Just bring yourself back to the present moment and continue to follow the script. (Note that you can abandon the script once you have the basic principles of the exercise memorized.)

Find a comfortable position. You can be seated in a chair or lying down on the floor or your bed. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Relax. Don't let yourself drift off to sleep, but allow your body to rest.

Now slowly bring your awareness to the tips of your fingers. Feel your fingers. Rub your fingertips together. How do they feel? Can you feel the small indentations on your fingertips that are your fingerprints? Take time to feel them. What are they like? Are your fingertips rough from lots of work or are they smooth and silky? How does it feel to rub them together? Notice the feelings and then move on.

Now rest your fingers where they were before. What are they touching? Are they resting on the blanket on your bed, or are they resting on the arm of your chair? What does that feel like? Is it soft or hard? Does it have any other distinguishing features? Is the blanket furry with cotton? Does the armrest have any markings or is it smooth? Take the time to completely absorb the way these objects feel to your fingertips.

Now bring your attention to your hands and arms. What do they feel like? Perhaps they are relaxed and heavy. Perhaps they are still tense from a long day's hard work. Either way is okay. There is no need to judge, simply observe the feelings in your arms and hands. Are there aches and pains? Take note of these but do not fixate on them. Simply note the pain and move on.

Move your attention down to your toes. Wiggle them around a little. Are they in shoes or socks? Are they free to move about? Squish your toes back and forth feeling whatever is beneath them. How does it feel? Can you tell what it is just by the feeling? Would you be able to tell only by touch? Just notice the sensations as you bring your awareness to your feet. How is your head positioned? If you are sitting, is your head aligned with your spine or is it drooping, resting on your chest. Without trying to change the position of your head, simply note where it is positioned. There is no right way for your head to be. Just let it be where it is. Now think about the sensations in your head. Do you have a headache? Is your head relaxed?

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Be Where You Are *continued*

What about your face? How does your face feel? There are all kinds of sensations to explore in your face. Think about your brow. Is it smooth and flat or is it crinkled up with stress? Again, don't try to change it, just notice it. Now bring awareness to your nose. Can you breathe freely or are you plugged up? Take a few deep breaths in and out of your nose. How does that feel? Can you feel cool air flowing into your lungs or is the air warm? Pay attention to the feeling for a moment. Then think about your mouth. How is your mouth positioned? Is it pursed? Is it open? Is it closed? What about the inside of your mouth. Is it wet or dry? Can you feel your saliva coat the inside of your mouth and throat? Explore all the sensations throughout your face. Perhaps you can feel oil on your skin. Perhaps your skin is dry. Perhaps there is no feeling at all. Just note it and move on.

Now think of your whole body. Where are you sitting or lying? Can you feel the back side of your body touch the chair or bed in various places? Be mindful of the way your body is positioned. There is no need to move, just observe.

Now think about the room that you are in. Where are you positioned in the room? So you have a sense of where the door is? What about the ceiling? Can you feel your body in the context of this larger space?

When you are ready, open your eyes and take a look around the room. You can move if you wish. Notice where the various pieces of furniture are in the room. What do they look like? You can spend as much time as you like investigating the different aspects of the furniture. Remember not to judge, just notice.

Whenever you are ready, you can stop this exercise and carry on with your day.

When you have completed the Be Where You Are exercise for the first time, take a few minutes to comment on it below. If you wish, you can continue this practice of writing your responses in a journal after each session, but it is not necessary.

(Reproduced from: Hayes, S. (2005) Get Out of Your Mind and into Your Life. New Harbinger Publications, Inc.: California).

Notes:

Five-Minute Mindful Breathing Meditation

Do this practice in a relaxing environment without distractions, such as the phone. You can do it either lying down or sitting up, but if you lie down and find yourself falling asleep, try a more upright posture. Bring your full, undivided attention to this practice as you read the following meditation, pausing after each paragraph. You can practice anytime throughout the day, combining this practice with the mindful check-in if you like.

Take a few moments to be still. Congratulate yourself for taking some time for meditation practice.

Bring your awareness to your breath wherever you feel it most prominently in your body. It may be at the nose, neck, chest, belly, or somewhere else. As you breathe in normally and naturally, be aware of breathing in, and as you breathe out, be aware of breathing out. Simply maintain this awareness of the breath, breathing in and breathing out.

There is no need to visualize, count or figure out the breath; just be mindful of breathing in and out. Without judgment, just watch the breath ebb and flow like waves in the sea. There’s no place to go and nothing else to do, just be in the here and now, noticing the breath - just living life one inhalation and exhalation at a time.

As you breathe in and out, be mindful of the breath rising on the inhalation and falling on the exhalation. Just riding the waves of the breath, moment by moment, breathing in and breathing out.

From time to time attention may wander from the breath. When you notice this, simply acknowledge where you went and then gently bring your attention back to the breath. Breathing normally and naturally, without manipulating the breath in any way, just be aware of the breath as it comes and goes.

As you come to the end of this meditation, congratulate yourself for taking this time to be present, realizing that this is an act of love. May we be at peace. May all beings be at peace.

(Reproduced from: Stahl, B. & Goldstein, E. (2010). A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook. New Harbinger Publications, Inc.: California).

Notes:

Weaving Mindfulness/Situational Awareness Throughout Your Day

From the moment you wake up to the moment you lay your head on the pillow at the end of the day, you have the opportunity to engage mindfulness as a way of life. However, if you're like most people, as soon as you awaken, the mind is already busy compiling to-do lists and thinking about how you'll accomplish everything.

When you're at work, you may find yourself thinking about your next task rather than what's before you, or wishing that the workday was over. A feeling of being rushed or overwhelmed may follow you into your household tasks, relationships, and even recreation, so that no matter what you're doing, part of your mind is thinking about other tasks you need to do or complete.

By choosing to become mindful throughout the day, you can bring greater focus and appreciation to whatever situation you find yourself in. You'll also feel more calm and at peace. As you continue to grow in mindfulness, you'll see the potential for informal practice in any situation. If you need some help getting started, here are some suggestions for informal ways to weave mindfulness into your day.

- As you open your eyes in the morning, instead of jumping out of bed, take a few moments to do a mindful check in. By starting the day with greater present moment awareness, you'll set the stage for a greater sense of calm and equanimity during challenging moments throughout your day.
- As you bathe, notice if your mind is already thinking, planning, and rehearsing for the day ahead. When you become aware of this, gently bring your mind back to the moment, being in the shower, smelling the soap, feeling the sensation of the water on your body, listening to the sound of the shower.
- If you live with others, try taking a few moments to listen and connect with them mindfully before you head out for the day.
- As you approach your car, walk more slowly, check in with your body, and notice any tension. Try to soften it before you begin your drive.
- When you drive, find opportunities to try driving a little slower. Use red lights as a reminder to notice your breathing.
- Walking is something we tend to do on autopilot. As you walk to your office or to run errands, walk different. For example, you might walk more slowly, or you could breathe in for 3 steps, then breathe out for three steps. Notice the sensations of walking - in your feet and throughout your body.
- When doing tasks at work, block out time to focus on a group of similar tasks. For example, block out time just for planning and don't attend to other tasks during that time. If you can, turn off your email during times when you're focusing on other tasks.
- If possible, maybe once a week, have a meal by yourself in silence, eating slightly slower than you usually do and really tuning in to flavours and textures as you eat.
- Throughout the day, do mindful check-ins from time to time. You can schedule them on your calendar, or you can link them to certain activities, such as prior to checking your email or before you drive through rush hour traffic.

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Weaving Mindfulness Throughout Your Day *continued*

- It's counterproductive to rush home to relax, so try driving home mindfully and slightly slower. Feel your hands on the steering wheel, and mindfully take in each moment. You could turn off the radio and reflect on what you did that day. What was positive, and what would you like to do better? Another possibility is to intentionally plan how you would like to be when you get home, perhaps putting mindful listening on the agenda.
- When you get home, do a mindful check-in before you walk in the door, notice if your body is tense. If it is, try to soften those muscles by breathing into them with awareness and just letting them be.

As you begin to integrate informal practice into your daily life, take some time to reflect on your experiences. What did you do? What did you notice about yourself before and after the practice? How did you act or react to others. What are you learning from informal practice? If you like, you can write about this in your journal.

Life is different now and while most of us rarely face immediate life-threatening dangers, we do face a multitude of daily stressors known as the 'modern jungle'. As a result, the fight, flight or freeze response can be triggered by being stuck in traffic, feeling overwhelmed at work, worrying about finances or health, or deploying for six months.

How we respond to stressors has less to do with the actual event than how we make meaning of the event. If your brain perceives danger even when there isn't an imminent physical threat and this automatic reaction occurs repeatedly and remains unchecked, your level of stress can build over time. When cortisol, epinephrine and norepinephrine continue to surge throughout the body, you can reach hyper adrenaline overdrive, which degrades your immunity and erodes your overall health. (Thau et al., 2021).

A critical way to counteract the stress response is to breathe deeply. We are born knowing how to deep breath naturally from our abdomen. If you have an opportunity, watch a baby breathe: with each breath, its entire belly rises and then returns to its initial position as the baby exhales. As adults, however, we get into the habit of many types of breathing, including upper chest and shallow breathing, over breathing, breath-holding and reverse breathing; all guarantee that air never reaches the diaphragm. Shallow breathing can increase tension and anxiety and leads to an imbalance of oxygen and carbon dioxide. That is why, in stressful situations, it is important to know and practice abdominal breathing.

As the popular saying 'take a deep breath' indicates, our breath can be used as a way to regulate our mind and emotions.

Reproduced from: Stahl, B. & Goldstein, E. (2010). A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook. New Harbinger Publications, Inc., California).