

Mindfulness: The Art of Doing Nothing

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Renting a room in Gillies Hall, somedays, I find myself experiencing the negative effects on my mental well-being that comes with being isolated in a small room - stress, frustration, loneliness, and more. Basically, I am a tiger stuck in the confines of a cage, reminiscing about the days when I was able to run freely in the wild. While it can be difficult to follow the rules and regulations the government has implemented in order to control the spread of the virus, I would like to emphasize that it is imperative that we do so to protect ourselves, our family and our community.

In order to keep my sanity in check, I practice mindfulness on a daily basis. Mindfulness, by definition, is simply the quality of being present and being fully aware of the moment. For starters, mindfulness doesn't eliminate stress and other difficulties in life. Instead, it helps you become aware of your negative emotions, giving you the ticket to handle them. Eventually, it becomes evident that mindfulness is able to reduce stress and boost happiness, focus and compassion, which are beneficial to students studying in the midst of a pandemic. Regular practice can lead to the ability to be present throughout the day and it changes our brain shape as well, rewiring them towards positive thoughts and emotions.

Some people may think that to be mindful, you need to wrap yourself in a white silk cloth, sit underneath a tree and bask in the glorious sunlight as you meditate for hours. Therefore, I would like to recommend that you avoid pressing the exit button on your screen and continue reading this article, because I am going to explore some ways in which you can practice mindfulness in the comforts of your own home (that doesn't require you to sit underneath a tree and all that, unless you want to).

Guided Meditation

It may not seem like it, but with all the responsibilities in our lives, it's actually challenging to just sit down and think about nothing. That would be the ultimate goal. However, there are a few ways in which you can still practice mindfulness even on the most restless days. See which one is your cup of tea.

- **Focused Attention and Noting** - the most common form of meditation. Simply sit down in a quiet area and focus on your breathing, noticing how your chest and your stomach rises and falls. Don't be distressed by the fact that you can get distracted by your surroundings or other thoughts - this is totally normal. Simply notice that you are distracted, accept it, then gently bring your attention back to your breathing.
- **Body Scan** - literally means scanning your body from head to toe. Notice how your body is in contact with the ground, any discomforts or aches anywhere. Personally, after noticing that a body part is tense, I would relax that part before moving on to the next, and with that, your stress will be kicked out of your body.
- **Visualization** - the idea is to focus on a person or something so that the familiar image can help you maintain a relaxed focus
- **Reflection** - at the end of the day, you can try to reflect on how your day went. Try to focus on the feelings that enter your mind, rather than your thoughts. You may also want to think about "What are you the most grateful for?". This really helps to focus on the positive aspects, which makes you happier in the long run.

Yoga

If you want to get some exercise into your daily routine as well, yoga is the way to go. There's many styles of yoga; some are fast-paced while others are restorative.

- **Vinyasa Yoga** - movement is coordinated with your breathing when flowing from one pose to another. It's also called power yoga so this would be perfect if you're looking for a mindful gym session on a yoga mat
- **Hatha Yoga** - the 'mother' of yoga. It's run at a slower pace than other styles so if you're a beginner this would definitely be worth trying out.
- **Ashtanga Yoga** - similar to Vinyasa yoga but the session involves a fixed flow of different poses. Like Vinyasa, it's very physically demanding so it'll be an interesting challenge. I would recommend that if you're looking to 'spice' up your routine with different poses every time, Vinyasa would be a better option. If you don't mind repetition, then why not try Ashtanga.
- **Yin Yoga** - very, very, very slow-paced. On a Sunday, if you're looking for a calm and relaxing rest day, Yin yoga involves holding poses for longer periods of time, letting you find your inner peace before tackling the upcoming week.

But they all incorporate the common principle of being aware of your breathing while performing yoga poses. A common class usually involves an introductory breathing session, followed by a warm-up, poses that stretch and strengthen your muscles, cool-down poses, relaxation and then finally some meditation.

Similarly, Tai Chi or Qi Gong are other options that you can think of. Originating in ancient China, it incorporates various movements with your breathing. Personally, this is not really my cup of tea as it's too slow for me. But who knows, maybe it could be yours!

Being aware of your task/action

If none of the things above seem to interest you or you are just extremely busy, that doesn't mean you still can't practice mindfulness. While doing your everyday tasks, instead of filling your head with thoughts about your assignments, you can just simply bring your attention to the moment. Let me give you some examples.

While showering, notice the temperature of the water. Is it hot? Is it cold? Maybe it's warm? Maybe you could think about how the water feels against your skin.

Cooking would be a great starting point as well. When you're cooking up your favourite meal, what can you smell? The herbs and spices? Maybe that burning smell when you've overcooked your chicken? Notice the sounds as well - the sizzling, the bubbling, etc. Trust me when I say this, when you really focus on how your food tastes, even the most simplest dishes can taste astronomical.

Usually when we're doing things, we're so worried about our future that we don't even notice these subtle sensations that are happening in the moment. Just be in the moment, be in the present. Your future problems are for your future self.

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