Mindful Moments in Difficult Times

Why Is Mindfulness Helpful?

During difficult and unsettling times, it can feel as if our minds are in a real whirl. There seems to be so much to keep track of, with routines changing and priorities shifting, that we feel there is no space to clear our thoughts. Finding time and space each day to allow our mind to focus on whatever it is we are doing, rather than multitasking or listing all that we need to do next, can really help us gain some much-needed clarity. This is where mindfulness can help.

What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is essentially a form of attention training, although the practice is more involved and expansive than simply learning to focus. It is about training our minds to dwell in the present moment, rather than being drawn away by thinking, analysis, rumination and stress.
Research shows that practising mindfulness can:

- help people manage stress, anxiety and depression;
- help people manage chronic pain;
- improve focus, concentration and creativity;
- improve emotional intelligence;
- enhance communication skills and make people more empathetic.

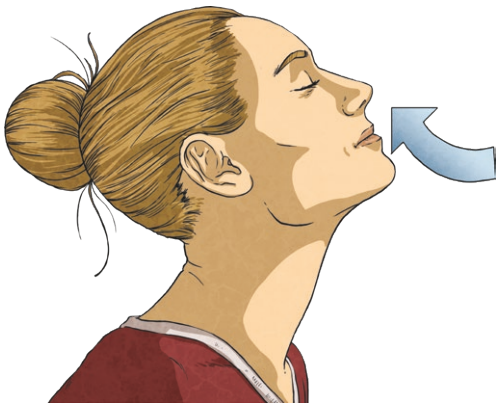
There is some evidence that suggests that mindfulness activities may not be suitable for those experiencing social anxiety. Speak to your doctor about what kinds of treatments might suit you best.

How Can We Be Mindful When There Is So Much Going On?

- Choose an activity to do mindfully throughout the day for one, two or five minutes. This activity can be something you would do normally, such as drinking a cup of tea, walking or washing the dishes. Try to really focus on what you are doing.
- Whatever you choose to do, be in that moment, in the present. See, hear, smell, touch, feel and breathe in the moment.
- Notice whenever other thoughts or sensations come to mind, acknowledge them and let them go. Then, refocus on your chosen mindful activity.
- Be patient and compassionate with yourself. You are doing wonderfully.

Some of the activities listed below will work well for you; some may be better suited to others. Try out different mindfulness activities to discover which work best for you.

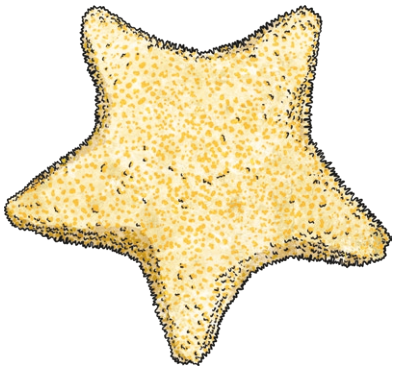
Place your hands on your stomach, close your eyes and focus on your breathing for two minutes, simply noticing the rise and fall of your stomach as you breathe in and out.



Take your pencil or pen for a walk on the page for one minute. Move it slowly around the page, smoothly and randomly, focusing on the shapes you are creating the whole time. Don't let the pencil or pen leave the page until the time is up.

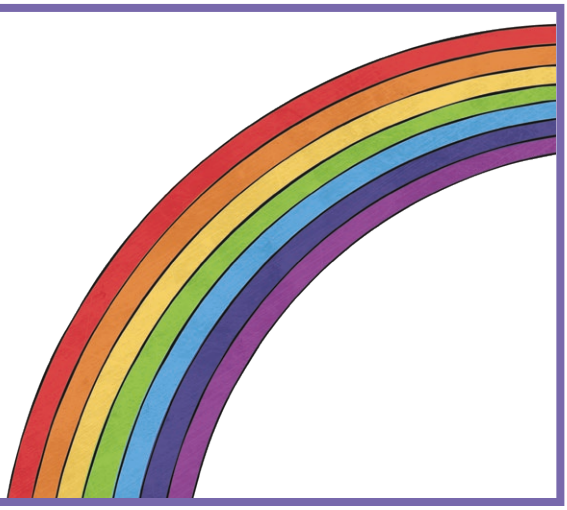
Sit comfortably on the floor, with your legs crossed in front of you. Imagine that there is a big balloon in your stomach. Place your hands over your stomach. Sitting up straight, take a big, deep breath in and make your stomach puff out as if it were a balloon filling with air. Then, exhale slowly, like you are letting the air out of a balloon a little at a time. As you let the air out, gently roll your shoulders and bend forwards. Repeat.

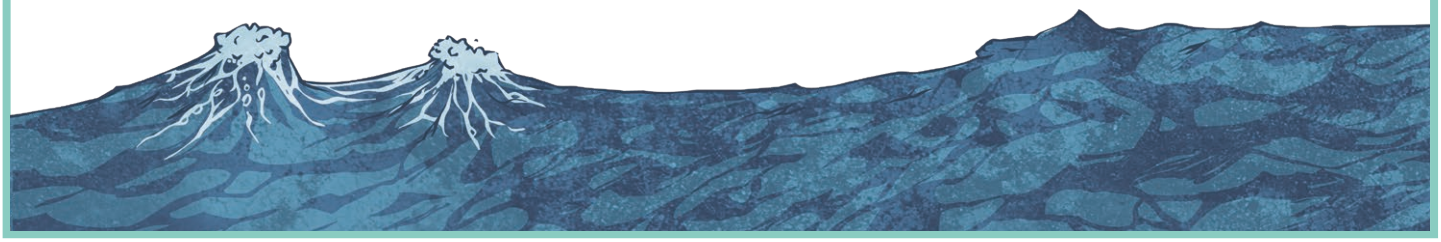
Sit on the floor, with your legs comfortably crossed in front of you. Open your left hand and extend it slightly in front of you so it looks like an open starfish. Take your right hand and extend your index finger. Beginning with your left thumb, move your right index finger up the outside of the thumb while taking a deep breath in. Go down the inside of the thumb and breathe out deeply. Continue breathing in deeply while going up each finger and exhaling when going down each finger. Once you are finished, switch hands and repeat.



Sit on the floor, with the soles of your feet touching and your knees bent out to the sides. Put your hands on your ankles and gently bounce your knees as if you are flapping butterfly wings. Close your eyes and breathe slowly and calmly. Be sure to take slow, deep breaths in and out. Pretend you are flying to your favourite place in the whole world. Imagine what it looks like. What do you see? What do you hear? What does it feel like? Imagine you are flying around, feeling happy and calm. Now, it is time to slowly flap your wings to fly back home. Take a deep breath in, slowly exhale and then gradually open your eyes.

Stand with your feet shoulder width apart, arms gently resting by your sides. Slowly, raise your arms and take a deep breath in. Try to breathe in until your hands meet over your head. Breathe out slowly while lowering the hands. Visualize the beautiful rainbow you are making. Repeat 5-10 times. Each time you breathe in, imagine you are adding another colour to your rainbow. What colours are you adding to your rainbow? Once your rainbow is complete, slowly open your eyes.



Sit on the floor in a comfortable position. Close your eyes and take some slow, deep breaths in and out. Picture a bright, shining sun smiling at you. Feel the sun on your face. Breathe slowly and let the sun warm your face. Imagine the sun warming your shoulders and back. Imagine the sun warming your arms. Continue to breathe in and out, slowly and calmly. Imagine the sun's warmth spreading to your legs. Finally, feel the warmth all the way to your fingers and toes. Slowly, stretch your arms overhead and your legs and feet out in front of you. Take a deep breath in and bend over towards your feet. Exhale slowly and sit back up. Take one more deep breath in and out and then slowly open your eyes.

Lie back gently on the floor, with your feet out in front of you. Place your hands on your stomach. Breathe in through your nose and feel your hands rise up. As you slowly exhale, feel your hands go back down. Pretend that the movement of your stomach is waves in the ocean and your hands are a sailing boat. Each time you breathe in, the sailing boat goes up on the waves and each time you breathe out, the sailing boat goes down on the waves. Repeat.