

# A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO MINDFULNESS & MEDITATION IN DAILY LIFE

BY: DYAN WILLIAMS

[www.dyanwilliams.com](http://www.dyanwilliams.com)  
[dyan@dyanwilliams.com](mailto:dyan@dyanwilliams.com)  
(612) 323-1859



# MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is paying attention to the present moment. It is being unconditionally present with what is before you without judgment or reaction.

You observe changing sensations, feelings, emotions, and thoughts without getting caught in reactivity. You don't cling to them, suppress them or resist them. You face experiences – whether painful or pleasant – exactly as they are. You let go of fixations on the past and musings about the future.

Mindfulness enables you to switch more easefully from open awareness to conscious discernment. This skill allows you respond deliberately to whatever is happening, instead of react based on old habits.

A meditation practice helps you learn the patterns and habits of your mind and cultivates mindfulness.

## **Benefits:**

- Increases mental focus and application
- Helps with overcoming distraction
- Builds patience
- Reduces stress
- Enhances processing of emotions in a healthy way
- Increases awareness of thoughts in a non-judgmental way
- Produces calmness and equanimity
- Encourages deliberate action instead of a reactive response

Mindfulness is a skill or state of mind that can be honed through various practices, including Meditation in Daily Life, Formal Meditation, and yoga.

# MEDITATION IN DAILY LIFE

Mediation is possible in ordinary, daily activities. A formal meditation practice helps, but is not required to cultivate mindfulness. You can practice mindfulness and meditate while taking a shower, driving, walking, eating, and waking up.

## **DRIVING**

When you get in the car, take three breaths before you turn on the engine.

Leave your radio off to help you experience the silence and pay attention to things that naturally arise.

Feel your hands on the steering wheel.

Feel your feet on the gas pedal and brake.

Let go of tensions in your body. Relax the muscles.

Drive at or just below the speed limit. Move into the slower lane if you must.

When you come to stop sign, notice your breathing. Inhale. Exhale. Observe your surroundings, including the sky, buildings, traffic and people.

When you see a red light, welcome it as a reminder to come back to the present moment.

Notice how the traffic lights mirror the ebb and flow of your day.

If you're stuck in traffic, be mindful of the other drivers around you and acknowledge that they too might feel impatient.

Come back to the present moment catch yourself spacing out, reacting to strong emotions or slipping into auto-pilot.

After you park your car and switch off the engine, take three deep breaths before you head off to your destination.

## **WALKING**

Walk in a clear space that's at least 20 to 30 feet long. (This could be in a hallway, around the perimeter of a room, or in a park)

Keep your arms relaxed by your sides.

Take slow, deliberate steps.

Feel the sensations that arise when you lift your foot, move it forward, and place it on the ground.

If your mind tends to wander, silently note "lift," "move," and "place" as you complete each motion.

Bring your attention back to your feet when you catch yourself getting distracted.

## **EATING**

Before you begin eating, think about the origin of the food and the nutrients it offers.

Use your senses to examine the food. Look at its colors. Feel the textures. Smell the aroma.

When you put the food in your mouth, really taste it. Feel the texture and sensations as it moves into your body.

Notice if you chew more on one side of your mouth than the other.

# FORMAL MEDITATION

Customary mediation involves sitting in a cross-legged (lotus) position on the floor. But sitting in a chair is usually the more comfortable option.

## How to Sit



### **1. Sit upright in your chair with your back straight and spine long.**

Let your shoulders drop away from your ears. Keep your chest open.

Avoid slouching, slumping, or resting your entire back against the chair. Be self-supporting so that only the very base of your spine touches the base of the chair-back.

If you have back problems, a weak neck, or other condition that prevents you from sitting upright, put a pillow between your back and the back of the chair.

### **2. Sit forward in the chair so both your feet are flat on the floor.**

If your feet don't reach the floor, get a shorter chair OR place a phone book or pillow under your feet so that your thighs are parallel to the floor. If your legs are too long, get a taller chair OR put a cushion or folded blanket on the seat of the chair to give you a bit more height.)

### **3. Rest your hands on your thighs, palms down or palms up.**

### **4. Close your eyes. Or keep them slightly open with a soft gaze on a spot, looking down at a 30 to 40 degree angle.**

# GENERAL TYPES OF MEDITATION

## Open Awareness Meditation

This involves keeping a panoramic awareness of whatever is happening without a specific focus on any object. This awareness is often compared to the spacious sky, the vast ocean or a deep river.

### Guided Exercise

Let your mind rest in open space of awareness. There's no need to focus your mind.

Simply notice what's present. Relax. Breathe.

Feel your breath flowing in and out. Be aware of the rise and fall of your chest.

As you sit, allow yourself to feel whatever body sensations arise.

Allow your thoughts and feelings to come and go like floating clouds in the sky.

Don't block sensations, thoughts and feelings that arise. Don't cling to them either.

Just observe them as they come and go.

Notice how you can step back and be the witness.

When you find yourself getting caught up in a thought, feeling, judgment, memory or projection of the future, simply come back to your breath.

Come to the end of your meditation by slowly opening your eyes. Sit quietly.

Simply allow whatever happens to just be.

Look around and notice what's in the room. What do you see? What do you hear?

Welcome back.

## **Object Meditation**

This involves focusing your attention on a single object, e.g. your breath, the body, a candle, a flower, a mantra. You embrace sensations, rather than fight them.

Breath Awareness Meditation and Body Scan Meditation are two common examples.

### **Guided Exercise - Breath Awareness**

Tune into your breath, wherever you feel it.

Don't try to control it or change the nature flow.

Notice if your breath is deep or shallow, fast or slow, even or uneven.

Stay open to the rise and fall of the breath.

Feel the breath passing through your nose as you inhale and exhale.

Observe your chest and belly as it moves with the breath.

Listen to the sounds of your breath.

As soon as you notice you are spacing out or thinking, come back to your breath.

If your mind wanders a lot, you can silently count your breath up to 10 (i.e. inhale 1, exhale 1, inhale 2, exhale 2, up to 10, and repeat).

### **Guided Exercise - Body Scan Meditation**

Take a few slow, deep breaths. Notice your breath flowing in and out.

Bring awareness to each part of your body, paying attention to the details.

Start from the crown of your head and move down to your toes (or the other way around)

Notice the sensations you feel in your head, throat, neck, shoulders, chest, belly, arms, hands, legs, feet. Notice how they come and go.

Notice if you're holding tension. Do you have a tight jaw, a lump in your throat, a clenched fist? Relax. Breathe into the tension. Let go.

When thoughts arise, just let them be and return your focus to your body.

Feel how everything is connected.

## **Mindfulness Meditation**

This involves the moment-to-moment awareness of changing objects of perception. You keep an open awareness as well as observe thoughts, feelings, and sensations as they come and go.

### **Guided Exercise**

Choose an object of focus, like your breath.

As you breathe in, know you're breathing in.

As you breathe out, know you're breathing out.

When feelings or sensations arise, whether pleasant or unpleasant, take note of their presence. Let them be. Don't cling to them or resist them.

If you get carried away by sensations, gently bring yourself back to your breath.

When thoughts or images rise, whether comfortable or uncomfortable, take note of their presence. Let them be. Don't cling to them or resist them.

If you find yourself getting hooked by your thoughts, mentally say "thinking." Gently bring yourself back to your breath.

Notice that there's a place within you that is like the sky or ocean.

Your feelings and thoughts are more like the clouds and the waves – they come and go.



# BASIC YOGA POSTURES

Basic Yoga Postures can help you develop body awareness and thus come back to the present moment.

You don't need to go the yoga studio to practice. Here are a few basic yoga postures you can do in your own home or office.



## **Tadasana (Mountain Pose)**

Stand tall with your arms at your sides.

Look straight ahead.

Press your feet into the floor, with your body weight distributed evenly between both sides.

Point the crown of the head towards the ceiling.

Relax your shoulders. Keep them down and back.

Lengthen your spine.

Gently lift the chest. Expand the rib cage. Open the heart.

Keep your hands at your sides or raise them to touch palms at heart center.

Remain in this pose for 30 seconds to 1 minute.

Be open to all the sensations and see what happens as you stand in this pose.



### **Upavsihta Garudasana (Seated Eagle Pose)**

Sit comfortably on a chair.  
Or stand tall.

Lengthen your spine.  
Keep your shoulders down  
and away from your ears.

Extend your arms straight  
in front of your body.

Bring your left arm under the right, crossing both arms at the elbow.

Bend your elbows and raise your forearms perpendicular to the floor.

Wrap your arms and hands.

Press your palms together (or as close together as possible). Keep your hands about 6 inches away from your face.

Uncross your arms and rest.

Repeat sequence on the other side.

When you are ready, release your arms and give them a few gentle shakes.



### **Vrkaasana (Tree Pose)**

Start by standing in Tadasana (Mountain Pose).

Pour your weight slightly onto the left foot, with inner foot firmly on the floor.

Lift your right calf as you bend your right knee. Clasp your right ankle with your right hand.

Bring your right foot up and firmly press the sole against the inner left thigh, above the knee (or against the inner left calf, below the knee)

Place your hands on the top of your pelvis. Keep the pelvis in a neutral position, parallel to the floor.

On an inhale, press your hands together at shoulder level.

Gaze softly ahead at a fixed point on the floor, about 4 feet in front of you.

Stay in this pose for 30 seconds to 1 minute.

On an exhale, step back to Tadasana. Then repeat the sequence on the other side.

## **Seated Sun Salutations**

Sit nice and tall in a chair with your feet flat on the floor.

Keep your hips directly below the shoulders.

Point the crown of the head straight up towards the ceiling.

Place your arms by the sides of the chair, palms up and open.

On an inhale, swoop the arms up above your head and as you turn your face upwards.

Open your chest until your palms touch overhead. Keep a soft gaze on your thumbs.

On an exhale, lower your arms in a swan dive. Bend forward from your hips, leading with your chest. Place your palms on the floor or on your shins.

Inhale and repeat.

On an exhale, draw your hands together at the heart.

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