



Mindfulness

Provides information on mindfulness, how to practise it and how it can help with mental health problems.

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About mindfulness

To give you an introduction to mindfulness, this page covers:

- [What is mindfulness?](#)
- [How does mindfulness work?](#)
- [Can mindfulness help treat mental health problems?](#)

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a technique you can learn which involves noticing what's happening in the present moment, without judgement. You might take notice and be aware of your mind, body or surroundings. The technique has roots in Buddhism and meditation, but you don't have to be spiritual, or have any particular beliefs, to try it.

Mindfulness aims to help you:

- become more self-aware
- feel calmer and less stressed
- feel more able to choose how to respond to your thoughts and feelings
- cope with difficult or unhelpful thoughts
- be kinder towards yourself.

"Mindfulness is a skill. It requires work like any therapy, and requires practice like any skill. It isn't a shortcut and courses only set the scene, but I find it enjoyable and rewarding. Most of all I find it brings some peace into my life."

What's it like to practise mindfulness?

In this video, Rebecca, a mindfulness teacher, explains her understanding of mindfulness. This video is five minutes and twenty-one seconds long.

[Watch the video on YouTube](#)

[Read a transcript of the video](#)

How does mindfulness work?

Mindfulness works by taking your focus to the present moment and away from other thoughts.

The way we think, and what we think about, can affect how we feel and act. For example, if you think or worry a lot about upsetting past or future events, you might often feel sad or anxious.

It is understandable to want to stop thinking about difficult things. But trying to get rid of upsetting thoughts can often make us think about them even more.

The theory behind mindfulness is that by using [various techniques](#) to bring your attention to the present, you can:

- **Notice how thoughts come and go in your mind.** You may learn that they don't have to define who you are, or your experience of the world, and that you can let go of them.
- **Notice what your body is telling you.** For example, you might feel tension or anxiety in your body, such as a fast heartbeat, tense muscles or shallow breathing.
- **Create space between you and your thoughts.** With this space, you can reflect on the situation and react more calmly.

For more information on how mindfulness works, see the [Oxford Mindfulness Centre website](#). This organisation also provides [free online mindfulness sessions](#).

"When I feel anxiety building, mindfulness helps me to keep calm by becoming more in touch with the situation."

Can mindfulness help treat mental health problems?

Studies show that practising mindfulness can help to manage common mental health problems like [depression](#), [anxiety](#) and feelings of [stress](#).

There is some evidence that mindfulness could help with more complex mental health conditions, such as [psychosis](#) and [bipolar disorder](#). But more research is needed in this area.

You might find mindfulness very helpful. Or you might feel like it doesn't work or makes you feel worse. It's important to do what works for you and your mental health. You can also talk to your doctor about what kinds of treatments might suit you best. You might find trying mindfulness is useful while waiting to receive other types of treatment.

For more information, see our page on [deciding if mindfulness is right for you](#).

In some cases, the [National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence \(NICE\)](#) recommends some structured [mindfulness-based therapies](#) which have been developed to treat mental health problems.

However, NICE does not recommend using mindfulness-based treatments for [social anxiety](#). This is because there's not enough evidence that it's effective.

"Mindfulness does help me with my mental health issues. It's not the cure and it won't work every single time, but it has helped me to alleviate anxiety and depression by centring my thoughts."

Mindfulness exercises and tips

This page covers:

- [Mindfulness exercises you can try](#)
- [How to get the most from mindfulness](#)

Mindfulness exercises you can try

If you want to try mindfulness, you don't need any special equipment for the following exercises:

- **Mindful eating.** This involves paying attention to the taste, sight and textures of what you eat. Try this when drinking a cup of tea or coffee for example. You could focus on the temperature, how the liquid feels on your tongue, how sweet it tastes or watch the steam that it gives off.
- **Mindful moving, walking or running.** While exercising, try focusing on the feeling of your body moving. If you go for a mindful walk, you might notice the breeze against your skin, the feeling of your feet or hands against different textures on the ground or nearby surfaces, and the different smells around you.
- **Body scan.** This is where you move your attention slowly through different parts of your body. Start from the top of your head and move all the way down to the end of your toes. You could focus on feelings of warmth, tension, tingling or relaxation of different parts of your body.
- **Mindful colouring and drawing.** Rather than trying to draw something in particular, focus on the colours and the sensation of your pencil against the paper. You could use a mindfulness colouring book or [download mindfulness colouring images](#).
- **Mindful meditation.** This involves sitting quietly to focus on your breathing, thoughts, sensations in your body or things you can sense around you. Try to bring your attention back to the present if your mind starts to wander. Many people also find that yoga helps them to concentrate on their breathing and focus on the present moment. For more information on meditation and yoga, see our page on [types of complementary and alternative therapies](#).

The above examples are not the only ways you can practise mindfulness. So many activities can be done mindfully. Different things work for different people, so if you don't find one exercise useful, try another. You can also try adapting them to suit you and make them easier to fit in with your daily life, such as mindfully cooking dinner or folding laundry.

Some people find practising mindfulness in nature can have extra benefits – for suggestions, see our page on [ideas to try in nature](#). For more general examples of exercises to try, see our page on [relaxation exercises](#).

"The mindfulness colouring really helps me unwind and relax in the evening. It promotes better sleep and I go to bed feeling ready to rest rather than anxious and wired."

Mindful eating

In this video, Jonny explains how you might try a mindful eating exercise. This video is two minutes and fifty-one seconds long.

[Watch the video on YouTube](#)

[Read a transcript of the video](#)

Tips on getting the most from mindfulness

To get the most out of mindfulness exercises, try your best to:

- **Pay attention.** Focus on things you can see, hear, smell, taste or touch. For example, when you take a shower, make a special effort to really pay attention to how the water feels on your skin.
- **Take notice.** When your mind wanders, which is just what minds do, simply notice where your thoughts have drifted to. Some people find it helpful to name and acknowledge the feelings and thoughts that come up. For example, you could think to yourself 'this is a feeling of anger', or 'here is the thought that I'm not good enough'.
- **Be aware and accepting.** Notice and be aware of the emotions you are feeling or sensations in your body. You don't need to try and get rid of any feelings or thoughts. Try to observe and accept these feelings with friendly curiosity, and without judgement.
- **Choose to return.** Choose to bring your attention back to the present moment. You could do this by focusing on your breathing or another sensation in your body. Or you could focus on your surroundings – what you can see, hear, smell, touch or taste.
- **Be kind to yourself.** Remember that mindfulness can be difficult and our minds will always wander. Try not to be critical of yourself. When you notice your mind wandering, you can just gently bring yourself back to the exercise.

"It sounded like a big undertaking but I was keen to get started. It felt like I might be

about to discover something new about how my mind works."

Practical tips for mindfulness

To get more out of mindfulness exercises, there are some practical things you can try to help improve your experience:

- **Set aside regular time to practise.** Regular, short periods of mindfulness can work better than occasional long ones. If you struggle to find the time, try choosing one or two things you already do daily, and do them mindfully. For example, you could practise mindfulness while doing the washing up or taking a shower.
- **Make yourself comfortable.** It can help to do mindfulness in a space where you feel safe, comfortable and won't be easily distracted. Some people also find that it helps to be outdoors or surrounded by nature.
- **Take it slowly.** Try to build up your practice bit by bit. You don't need to set ambitious goals or put pressure on yourself. Remember, you're learning a new skill that will take time to develop.
- **Don't worry about whether you're doing it right.** Try not to worry about doing the exercises correctly. Focus on using them in the ways that are most helpful for you. Many people find it takes a while to feel comfortable doing mindfulness exercises.

"Mindfulness makes me feel safe because even when I can't access my counsellors, carers, medication and relapse prevention plan, mindfulness is still there. Nothing can take it away."

How and where to learn mindfulness

There are many ways you can learn mindfulness, which come in different formats. This page covers:

- [Introductory courses, taster sessions and groups](#)
- [Formal mindfulness courses \(MBCT and MBSR\)](#)
- [One-to-one private sessions](#)
- [Buddhist mindfulness courses](#)
- [Self-guided resources](#)

Check your mindfulness teacher's qualifications

Mindfulness course should always be delivered by an appropriate person. Check your teacher is listed by the [British Association of Mindfulness-Based Approaches \(BAMBA\)](#). This shows that they are:

- properly trained
- hold insurance
- are supervised by another experienced professional.

"Sometimes mindfulness makes you turn towards things you would normally avoid. That can be challenging. But if you have an experienced mindfulness teacher they can help you to pace yourself."

Introductory courses, taster sessions and groups

If you choose to learn mindfulness with an introductory course, this type of option:

- can range from a one-day course to an eight-week course
- is typically very structured and will go through basic concepts and exercises
- may be tailored to particular groups, such as students, people serving in the military or people with a particular diagnosis.

Brief taster sessions and informal mindfulness groups are also common.

How to find introductory courses, taster sessions and groups

You might find that these are organised through your place of work or education, or a local library or community centre.

Some [local Mind branches](#) may run mindfulness courses and groups. For a fee, some [private teachers](#) may also offer introductory courses.

"I went on a mindfulness course once a week for about eight weeks. It covered body mindfulness, mindful eating, mindful walking, mindful environmental awareness and more."

Formal mindfulness courses (MBCT and MBSR)

Some structured mindfulness therapy programmes have been developed to treat specific problems. The most well-established courses are:

- **Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT)** for [depression](#) and [anxiety](#).
- **Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR)** for general [stress](#). It can also help you manage long-term health conditions.

In some cases the NHS recommends these treatments, as studies show that they can work well. But availability on the NHS varies across the country and waiting lists can be long.

Different courses may have slightly different structures, but in general they:

- are delivered by **qualified practitioners**
- last for a **fixed number of sessions**, across a specific time frame – typically a two-hour session, every week for eight weeks, although some courses may offer shorter introductory sessions
- involve **group work and group discussion**, but you can usually contribute as much as you feel comfortable with
- include a **mixture of meditation and daily mindfulness exercises**, which you're asked to practise between sessions.

Some other types of talking therapies use mindfulness techniques, such as [dialectical behaviour therapy \(DBT\)](#).

How to find formal mindfulness courses

To find a formal mindfulness course near you, you can:

- arrange to [talk to your GP](#)
- search via the online [NHS service finder](#)
- look in the [private sector](#), but this will cost money.

You can find out more on the [MBCT website](#), or see our pages on [cognitive behavioural therapy \(CBT\)](#) and [talking therapy and counselling](#).

"As the course starts, it isn't always clear exactly how it will help. The encouragement to just do something, to put one foot in front of the other without thinking about it and questioning it too much can be really helpful."

One-to-one private sessions

For a fee, some mindfulness teachers offer one-to-one sessions through the [private sector](#). Some therapists and counsellors also have mindfulness training and can integrate these techniques into their approach.

One-to-one sessions may be expensive. But they are more likely to be tailored to your particular situation and won't include group work.

How to find private sessions

You can look for a qualified mindfulness teacher or therapist in your local area through:

- the online search tool of the [British Association of Mindfulness-Based Approaches \(BAMBA\)](#), which only lists qualified teachers
- one of the professional bodies listed in our information on [how to find a private therapist](#).

For more information on things to consider when starting any kind of therapy, see our page [getting the most from therapy](#).

Buddhist mindfulness courses

These courses include traditional Buddhist practices of mindful meditation and other mindful techniques, in the context of Buddhist teaching. These are likely to promote general mental wellbeing rather than tailored treatment for specific health problems.

How to find Buddhist mindfulness courses

These courses are usually taught at Buddhist centres. See [Buddhanet's World Buddhist Directory](#) to find a Buddhist centre near you. Contact them directly to see what they offer.

Self-guided resources

There are many self-guided resources to help you through different mindfulness exercises. Apps, books and audio – such as CDs and podcasts – are typically less structured than online courses.

Self-help resources have no formal regulation, and vary greatly in quality and cost. This can make it hard to judge what might work for you. But in general, it's a good idea to look for a course or resource that:

- is designed by qualified mindfulness teachers
- gives you clear information about its potential benefits and risks
- provides information about research studies that have explored how effective it is
- is supported by the NHS or a mental health organisation
- has been recommended to you by someone you trust.

Many people practise mindfulness online or use a smartphone app to help. Online resources might be useful when you're feeling less able to engage in face-to-face support.

For support with using digital mental health tools, see our information on [staying safe online](#).

How to find self-guided resources

For books and audio:

- Take a look at the reading lists for mindfulness books on [Reading Well](#) and [Overcoming](#).
- Try visiting your local library or bookshop to find appropriate titles.
- Search for mindfulness podcasts on streaming platforms or online.

For online courses and apps:

- [NHS Digital Apps Library](#) lists free online courses and apps related to mindfulness.
- [Smiling Mind](#) offers a free mobile app for practising mindfulness exercises.
- [Headspace](#) is a mobile subscription app for mindfulness – the free version covers basic exercises.
- [Breathworks](#) offers mindfulness courses to manage pain, stress and illness. These courses tend to cost money.

For more tips on doing mindfulness by yourself, see our page on [mindfulness exercises](#).

Is mindfulness right for me?

Although anyone can try it, being mindful isn't always easy to do. It can take practice, and might not be right for everyone. There is a lot of information available about mindfulness, which can feel overwhelming or confusing.

This page covers:

- [Practical considerations](#)
- [Wellbeing considerations](#)
- [What if mindfulness doesn't work for me?](#)

Practical considerations

When thinking about whether mindfulness is right for you, there are some practical considerations. It might help to think about the following before you try it out:

- **How do I want to learn mindfulness?** There are lots of ways to learn mindfulness, and they won't all suit everyone. For more information about your options, see our page on [how and where to learn mindfulness](#).
- **How much will it cost?** Many everyday [mindfulness exercises](#) are free to do, but formal courses, apps and learning materials may cost money.
- **Can I fit this practice into my life?** It is helpful to practise mindfulness regularly. Think about what times might work best for you. If you're attending a [mindfulness course](#), you might also have to travel to weekly sessions, which can be demanding.

Wellbeing considerations

For your physical and mental health, it might help to think about the following before trying mindfulness:

- **Are the exercises safe for me to do?** Some may involve sitting still for long periods of time and focusing on your breath, which might not be suitable for everyone. For example, if you have mobility issues or breathing problems. [Talk to your GP](#) or a trained mindfulness teacher if you have any concerns.
- **Am I prepared to acknowledge my difficult thoughts?** This can sometimes be distressing and could make you feel worse at first. If you find the exercises hard to do, then it's best to get advice from a trained professional.
- **Is mindfulness the right tool for my problems?** Mindfulness tends to be quite a general wellbeing tool. If you want to work on a specific issue, you might find a more focused treatment helps more. You might however find it useful to try mindfulness while waiting to receive another treatment.

- **Am I well enough to start something new right now?** If you're feeling very unwell, trying to learn a new skill might feel overwhelming. You might need more [treatment and support](#) in place before you can begin.

"Sometimes mindfulness puts me in touch with feelings I've been pushing away. In the long term that's better but at the time it can be really distressing."

What if mindfulness doesn't work for me?

Although some people find mindfulness helpful, not everyone does. Mindfulness might not be the best option for you. Or it might help you at some times and not others. If you've tried something and it hasn't helped, it's important not to blame yourself.

Looking after your mental health can be really difficult, especially when you're not feeling well. It can take time and may not be straightforward. But many people find that with the right combination of treatments, self-care and support, it is possible to feel better.

For other options you can explore, see our pages on [looking after your wellbeing](#) and [seeking help for a mental health problem](#).

"When I'm in a particularly unwell state mindfulness is not beneficial, as I cannot bring myself into the present at all."

Useful contacts for mindfulness

Mind's services

- [Mind's helplines](#) provide information and support by phone and email.
- [Local Minds](#) offer face-to-face services across England and Wales. These services include talking therapies, peer support and advocacy.
- [Side by Side](#) is Mind's support online community for anyone experiencing a mental health problem.

Other organisations for mindfulness

Breathworks

breathworks-mindfulness.org.uk

Provides mindfulness courses and resources to help with long-term conditions, including pain and stress.

British Association of Mindfulness-Based Approaches (BAMBA)

bamba.org.uk

Network for mindfulness-based teacher training organisations. Includes a searchable list of mindfulness teachers.

Buddhanet

buddhanet.net

Information about Buddhism, including a directory of local groups.

Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)

mbct.co.uk

Information about mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) including online resources.

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)

[nice.org.uk](https://www.nice.org.uk)

Produces guidelines on best practice in healthcare.

NHS Service Finder

[nhs.uk/service-search](https://www.nhs.uk/service-search)

Searchable database of NHS services in England.

Oxford Mindfulness Centre

[oxfordmindfulness.org](https://www.oxfordmindfulness.org)

Information and research about mindfulness, including mindfulness sessions and training for mindfulness teachers.

Reading Well

[reading-well.org.uk](https://www.reading-well.org.uk)

A series of self-help books to help you understand and manage your health and wellbeing.

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References are available on request.