

What Is Mindfulness?

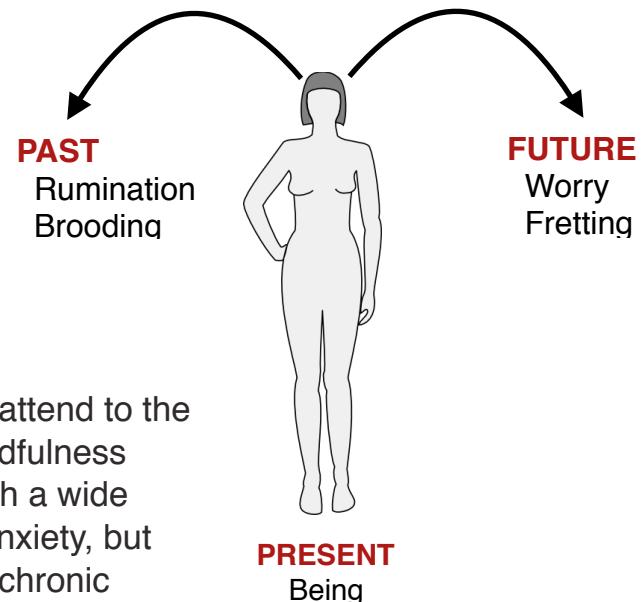
Mindfulness is the short term for mindfulness meditation practice. This is a form of self-awareness. Mindfulness is about being aware of what is happening in the present, moment-by-moment, without making judgements about what we notice.

Mindfulness meditation practice is key ingredient in a variety of evidence-based psychotherapies, including dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT).

Why should I practice mindfulness?

Our minds can be focused on things in the past, present or future. We often find ourselves ruminating about events that have already happened, or worrying about things that could happen. These habits of thought are often distressing.

Mindfulness is a practice which encourages us to attend to the present moment. There is good evidence that mindfulness practice can help people cope more effectively with a wide variety of feeling-states such as depression and anxiety, but also with physical health conditions including chronic pain and illness.



Why do I need to practice? Can't I pay attention to the present moment already?

We can all pay attention to the present moment, at least for a short while. If you haven't tried meditation before, though, you might notice that your attention wanders and is not easily controlled. Mindfulness strengthens our ability to pay attention in the present moment, but also increases our awareness of how our minds fluctuate, often in unhelpful ways. People who practice mindfulness regularly find that it helps their ability to stay in the present moment without being deflected.

What does it mean to 'cultivate a non-judgmental attitude'?

Shakespeare said "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so", and this is a core idea in therapies like cognitive behavioral therapy. Making judgements about our own experiences can often lead to us becoming quite distressed. For example, thoughts like "this is horrible" and "I can't take any more" are both judgements associated with distress. Practicing mindfulness teaches us to accept more of our experience without judging it. This has been shown to help people live more fulfilling lives.

*Adopted and modified from Psychology Tools by Michele Neverdon, MA