

Mindfulness.

Mindfulness has become popular recently and there are good reasons for it to have done so: it is easy, enjoyable and effective.

Relevant to: Depression:  Anxiety:  Irritability/Anger:  General emotional control: 

The most popular exercise.

The first key skill to master is to observe and describe without judging. The most well known exercise for this is the raisin exercise, where you select a raisin, describe its appearance – its shape, its, size, its colour, its texture – and its smell, then put it in your mouth and describe how it feels in the mouth and what it tastes like, then biting into it and describing how that feels and tastes, then swallowing it, again describing how it feels. All the while avoiding judging words, so you might say it is brownish and wrinkly, but you wouldn't in mindfulness say it looks nice or nasty.

And you can practice your mindfulness observing and describing skills on any food you like: it is excellent because you can describe appearance, smell, taste, touch, everything except sound.



Mindful breathing.

When you are ready you can move on to doing the same with your own breathing: describing your breathing without judgement. Describing what is happening and how it feels, without saying it is good bad or anything else judging. Whereas with food you can describe out loud, with your breathing you need to do it sub-vocally because otherwise you interfere with the very thing you are describing. Once you are doing this, you are effectively doing a level of mindful meditation.



The body scan.

You can take it a step further by performing a 'body scan' where you systematically describe how every part of your body feels, and the sensations in every part of your body, typically starting with the top of your head and working slowly down to the tips of your toes. Most people find this relaxing and enjoyable, especially if you can refrain from judging whether you are doing it well or badly – in mindfulness you avoid every form of judging, even to the extent of avoiding judging how well or badly you are doing it!



Dodging the second arrow.

Finally, and this is my personal favourite, you can observe your emotions without judgement. So you can observe that you are happy sad relaxed or worried without judging whether these are good or bad emotions. This is a great thing to do because it avoids what they term 'the second arrow' hitting home. Typically, when we are distressed, we become distressed that we are distressed, which produces a downward spiral that is immensely more disruptive than the original distress. Observing our emotions without judgement avoids this happening.

Practice makes perfect.

So the basics of mindfulness are simple enjoyable and effective, and you may decide to practice them daily, even two or three times a day. The fact of them being enjoyable and effective means it makes sense to do just that.

In-session discussion:

What have been your experiences of mindfulness, relaxation, or similar exercises?

Mythbuster:

"When you get distressed you must always take active steps to reduce that distress." Not true.

It sounds like it should be true, but it isn't. Sometimes it's best to sit back and observe your distress non judgementally, because by doing so you avoid 'the second arrow'.

Project:

The project for you to do between now and next time is to practise mindfulness in which ever of the ways above you want to.

Tip: Mindfulness does not say that you mustn't take other measures to reduce your distress, it simply says that you needn't.