



Practice Mindfulness

CHALLENGE

Develop a daily habit to improve your life

Requirements to complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™

1. Read “Practice Mindfulness.”
2. Make a plan to practice mindfulness that fits your life today, two weeks from now, in a month.
3. Keep a record of your completed challenge in case your organization requires documentation.

When Conor McGregor was a plumber, he wasn't happy. It was a typical career path in Ireland, but it wasn't for him. He struggled to make a living. But instead of giving up, he started thinking about how to change his situation.

At first, it was simple things like keeping a journal. Or spending a few focused minutes a day thinking about what he really wanted to do. He created a mindfulness practice.

And then it happened. He won a series of mixed-martial arts fights. He landed a contract with the Ultimate Fighting Championship. And he found himself grappling with some of the toughest fighters in the world looking for a way to land a punch or escape a submission hold.

“It's experience,” says McGregor. “It's repetition. “The more you experience in training, the more you compete, you just become comfortable in it. You're able to be more relaxed. And you realize being able to slow your mind down in a situation like that is a skill.”



Today, McGregor still uses the mindfulness practices he began years ago. He writes in a journal. He takes time to think about his training sessions and fights. And he reflects on what went right, what went wrong, and where he can improve.

You probably don't have any plans to become a professional fighter. But you can tap into the power of mindfulness to improve your life and your health. And you can benefit from mindfulness, even if you only have a few minutes a day. Take the month-long health challenge to *Practice Mindfulness*.

How much do you know about mindfulness?

Take this quiz to find out:

- | | T | F |
|----|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- You typically don't think about any one thing for more than 3 to 4 seconds at a time, without being interrupted by other thoughts.
- Practicing mindfulness can improve the area of the brain used for memory and learning.
- A daily meditation or mindfulness habit can help you sleep better, reduce stress, prevent heart disease, and lower blood pressure.
- Multi-tasking can increase stress, impair learning, and make you less productive.
- Paying attention to the texture and taste of food and how you feel when you're eating is an example of mindfulness.

How did you do? Mindfulness isn't just a feel-good activity. Research shows making time for mindfulness activities can actually improve your health in many ways. And it doesn't have to take long. Even a couple minutes a day of deep breathing and reflection can provide important health benefits, redirect your thoughts, and help you make better decisions.

Answers: 1. True. 2. True. 3. True. 4. True. 5. True.

The Definition of Mindfulness

Even though more than 30 million people in the United States meditate every day, it's still a bit of a misunderstood activity.

- Do you sit cross-legged on a pillow and hum quietly to yourself?
- When you meditate, do you try and solve all your problems?
- Is it just for people who have an interest in spirituality?
- Does it require long periods of silence for hours a day?
- If you do it once to try it out, will it work?

The answer to all of these questions: No.

“It's about paying attention in a systematic way,” says mindfulness expert Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn.¹

Mindfulness is a way of paying attention to your thoughts, feelings, sensations, and environment. But instead of trying to problem-solve, mindfulness is simply being aware of what's happening in the present moment.²

Top 10 reasons why mindfulness is cool
tinyurl.com/y9bz74yl

Are you in control of your thoughts?

Try this out. Stop and pay attention to your thoughts for just a minute.

Is your mind racing from one thought to the next? That's typical.

Mindfulness can help you learn to focus your thoughts and be more aware of what's really happening. It takes consistent effort. But anyone

can learn to practice mindfulness. It doesn't cost anything. And you can tap into the benefits of mindfulness in just a few minutes a day.

Create Your Mindfulness Practice

Want to tap into the benefits of mindfulness? It takes practice. But you can do it, even if you're busy. This mindfulness practice only takes a total of 9 minutes a day. Here's what you'll need to know:



Where? A quiet place where you can be alone without distractions



When? Morning, afternoon, and before bed.

How long? 3 to 5 minutes

Be Mindful – Week 1

1. Set a timer for 3-5 minutes.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Pay attention to all the thoughts in your head about work, family, and other things. Notice how you're feeling.
4. Focus on your breath as you inhale and exhale.

Be Mindful – Week 2

1. Set a timer for 3-5 minutes.
2. Close your eyes. Try not to think about anything for the first minute.
3. After a minute, think about your day, what you have planned, or what you accomplished for the day.
4. After two minutes, focus on your breathing.
5. Breathe in deeply through your nose. Hold the breath for 5 seconds. Exhale slowly through your mouth for 7 seconds.

"Practicing mindfulness can bring improvements in both physical and psychological symptoms as well as positive changes in health attitudes and behaviors."

Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn

Be Mindful – Week 3

1. Set a timer for 3-5 minutes.
2. Close your eyes. Sit in silence, and try not to think about anything for the first minute.
3. Place a hand on your stomach. Breathe in through your nose for 5 seconds. Exhale through your mouth for 7 seconds. Repeat.
4. Focus your thoughts on your breathing, and feel the rise and fall of your stomach.
5. Pay attention to your thoughts and feelings. Think about what you have planned, or what you accomplished for the day.

Be Mindful – Week 4

1. Set a timer for 3-5 minutes.
2. Close your eyes. Sit in silence, and try not to think about anything for the first minute.
3. Breathe in through your nose for 5 seconds. Exhale through your mouth for 7 seconds.
4. Place a hand on your stomach. **Now breathe in through your mouth, and exhale through your nose.**
5. Focus your thoughts on your breath. Feel the rise and fall of your stomach. And notice how it's different.
6. Pay attention to your thoughts and feelings. Think about what you have planned, or what you accomplished for the day.

When you learn to practice mindfulness, it changes the way you think and feel. You can use mindfulness to improve your mood, develop healthy habits, and be healthier.

Video:
12-minute mindfulness exercise for beginners
tinyurl.com/y7vdooy3

Health Benefits of Mindfulness

Think you're too busy to set aside a few minutes a day to practice mindfulness? It's easy to think that when you've got a million things on your mind. But you don't want to miss out on the health benefits of mindfulness. Research shows daily meditation or mindfulness habits can help:^{3,4}

- ✓ Reduce stress
- ✓ Support heart health
- ✓ Lower blood pressure
- ✓ Develop healthier relationships
- ✓ Improve digestion
- ✓ Support memory and learning
- ✓ Treat depression and anxiety
- ✓ Promote positive thinking
- ✓ Improve sleep quality

References

1. Kabat-Zinn, J. (2010). What is mindfulness? University of California – Berkeley. From: <http://tinyurl.com/y7vdooy3>
2. Bishop, S., et al. (2004). Mindfulness: A proposed operational definition. *Clinical Psychology Science and Practice*, 11(3):230-241. Doi: 10.1093/clipsy.bph077
3. Harvard University. (2017). Benefits of Mindfulness. <http://tinyurl.com/ybo3ggs5>
4. Keng, S.L., et al. (2011). Effects of mindfulness on psychological health: A review of empirical studies. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 31(6):1041-1056. doi: 10.1016/j.cpr.2011.04.006



Practice Mindfulness

CHALLENGE

Develop a daily habit to improve your life

Instructions

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, or add to your digital calendar).
2. Take action to practice mindfulness that fits your life today, in a week, in a month.
3. Use the calendar to record your actions and choices to practice mindfulness and make it a regular part of your life.
4. Review your progress at the end of each day, each week, and at the end of the month. Then keep up the practice for a lifetime of best health.

MONTH: _____							HC = Health Challenge™ ex. min. = exercise minutes
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary
HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	
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_____ Number of days this month I practiced mindfulness

_____ Number of days this month I exercised at least 30 minutes

Other wellness projects completed this month:

Name _____ Date _____