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mindfulness

YOUR GUIDE TO A

peaceful mind

Expert Tips to Find Calm and Get Focused



Tame Your Inner Critic

Mindful Ways to Age with Ease

The Science of Happiness

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FROM LEFT: ROB AND JULIA CAMPBELL/STOCKSY; TRINETTE REED/STOCKSY



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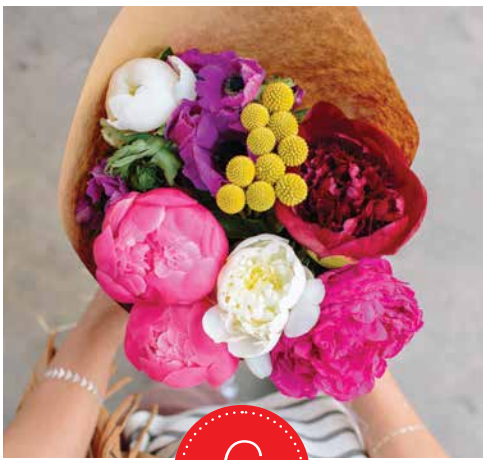
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FROM LEFT: VICTOR TORRES/STOCKSY; KRISTEN CURETTE HINES/STOCKSY

Start With Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a natural quality that we all possess. It's available to us in every moment if we take the time to appreciate it. When we practice mindfulness we're practicing the art of creating space for ourselves—space between us and our reactions.

Here are a few things to consider before you begin:

You can practice anywhere. There's no need to go out and buy a special cushion or bench—just devote some time and space each day to access your mindfulness skills.

There's no way to stop your thoughts. What? But isn't that what you always hear about meditation? Well yes, it is, but no, that's not the goal. And it's not really possible, anyway. Oh, and there's no bliss state or otherworldly communion, either. All you're trying to do is pay attention to the present moment, without judgment. Sounds easy, right? Well...

Your mind will wander. As you practice paying attention to what's going on in your body and mind, thoughts arise. Perhaps dozens of thoughts, maybe even hundreds. Your mind might drift to something that happened yesterday, meander to your to-do list—it will try to be anywhere but where you are. But the wandering mind isn't something to fear; it's part of human nature. It also provides the magic moment for the first essential piece of mindfulness practice, the piece that we believe leads to healthier, more agile brains: the moment when you recognize that your mind has wandered. Because if you can notice this, then you can consciously bring your mind back to the present moment. The more you do it, the easier it is.

Your judgy brain will try to take over. The second important piece in mindfulness is the "without judgment" part. We're all guilty of listening to the critic in our heads more than we should. But, when you practice investigating your judgments and defusing them, you learn to choose how you look at things and react to them. When you practice mindfulness, try not to judge yourself for whatever thoughts pop up. Notice judgments arise, make a mental note of them (some people label them "thinking"), and let them pass.

It's all about returning your attention, again and again. It seems like the mind is wired to get carried away in thought. That's why we use the sensation of breathing as an anchor to the present moment. And every time you return to the breath, you reinforce your ability to do it again. Call it a bicep curl for your brain.

While mindfulness might seem simple, it's not necessarily all that easy. The real work is to make time every day to just keep doing it.



How to Meditate

Take a seat Find a place to sit that feels calm and quiet to you.

Set a time limit If you're just beginning, it can help to choose a short time, such as 5 or 10 minutes.

Notice your body You can sit in a chair with your feet on the floor, you can sit loosely cross-legged, in Lotus Pose, you can kneel—all are fine. Just make sure you are stable and in a position you can stay in for a while.

Feel your breath Follow the sensation of your breath as it goes in and as it goes out.

Notice when your mind has wandered Inevitably, your attention will leave the breath and wander to other places. When you get around to noticing this—in a few seconds, a minute, five minutes—simply return your attention to the breath.

Be kind to your wandering mind Don't judge yourself or obsess over the content of the thoughts you find yourself lost in. Just come back.

That's it! That's the practice You go away, you come back, and you try to do it as kindly as possible.

PLAINPICTURE/ELEKTRONS 08





quiet

"It's the open spaces in any life, I suspect—
the moments when you lose yourself—
that make for happiness, peace, and clarity."

—Pico Iyer

ROB AND JULIA CAMPBELL/STOCKSY

Breathe Deep

We know that nasal breathing is calming. Research now indicates it may also improve cognitive function.

By Crystal Goh



NABI TANG/STOCKSY



TRINETTE REED/STOCKSY

We're all familiar with the advice "Just take a deep breath" when emotions run high. Science has confirmed that slow, deep breathing calms by reducing heart rate and activating the parasympathetic (calming) nervous system. The result? Your body relaxes and your mind quiets.

Breathing through your nose may enhance that effect. Through a series of experiments, scientists at Northwestern Medicine discovered that nasal breathing plays a pivotal role in coordinating electrical brain signals in the olfactory "smell" cortex—the brain regions that directly receive input from our nose—which then coordinates the amygdala (which processes emotions) and the hippocampus (responsible for both memory and emotions). During nasal inhalation, the fast electrical rhythms in both became stronger. In a final experiment, when showed images, people had better recall later on if they first encountered the images on an inhalation through the nose.

So the in-breath specifically alters your cognition, improving both emotional and memory processing. What about the out-breath? The good news is that any slow, steady breathing—like the kind employed in meditation and yoga—activates the calming part of the nervous system, and slows heart rate, reducing feelings of anxiety and stress. The act of slow, deep breathing, whether the inhalation or exhalation, is beneficial for your nervous system when you wish to be more still.

Crystal Goh is a neuroscientist and writer.

Take a Moment

Feeling too busy to function at your best? Here are 5 opportunities to pause, recharge your batteries, and stay on top of your game.

By Janice Marturano

Perpetual busyness, which used to be intermittent enough that we could see contrast between chock-full days and the others, seems like it might be the new norm in the 21st century. We're all socked in with activity with no break in our schedules.

To function with competence calls for perspective that's hard to find when we've got our heads down, forging through a never-ending to-do list, hoping things will work out. The kind of perspective that brings focus and clarity comes from having a little space to breathe.

While we may not always have a choice about clearing our calendars, we can make the choice to clear our minds of the habitual momentum that blocks creativity and compassion. One powerful tool is taking purposeful pauses, mini-breaks in the momentum and speed of our mind and our days. They interrupt the fog that gathers when we're on autopilot, and give us the space to reset and re-center. When we do, we're more likely to make conscious choices about our work and our activities that are productive, creative, and compassionate.

Try experimenting with the ideas on the following pages, and see if your days begin to feel a little different.

DOBRÁNSKA RENÁTA/STOCKSY



1 Sip and Enjoy

Whether you make or buy your morning coffee, tea, smoothie or other morning beverage, start paying attention to its preparation. Notice the sounds in the room, the aromas created in its creation, the warmth (or coolness) of the cup in your hand, the taste as you take that first sip, and the feelings that arise as it's swallowed.

Don't multitask: no phones, laptops, newspapers, etc. Just meet the moment with your drink in hand, and when your mind takes you away, for example, to review your morning to-do list, redirect your attention back to the experience of drinking your beverage.

When you begin your day this way, you intentionally engage in a mini-training of your mind to be present. You use your body's sensations to keep you grounded in the present. And, rather than getting distracted by texts, emails or to-do lists, missing the experience completely, when you finish your morning beverage and turn to the next task at hand, your attention is rested and ready to engage.

2 Use the Door

Workday mornings can be pretty hectic. Even if the alarm goes off on time and you've had your mindful morning drink, there's always something that can throw you off schedule. Such unexpected life challenges can mean you go out into the world feeling stressed. This is the perfect time to check in at the front door.

Before you leave your house or enter your work (any front door will do for this exercise), check in with yourself. Bring your mind to where your body is, about to transition into a new situation. Let the door be your cue; it's a natural place for a brief pause and to bring your attention into the present moment.

Pay attention to the sensations in your body: the feel of the door handle, muscles tensing to push the door open, the temperature and sound differences between outside and inside, the feeling of your breath in your body.

These few moments of deliberately paying attention to your experience as you arrive in a new place, of deliberately noticing whatever is there for you to notice, can help you feel more centered as you begin your day.



DUET POSTSCRIPTUM/STOCKSY

3 See the Big Picture

How often, after a string of appointment-and-meeting-filled days, do you wonder how time slipped away while you never managed to get around to what you really wanted to do? As any good quarterback knows, in every play you need to see the big picture and know the best way to allocate resources. For us, it means keeping our larger goals in mind, and making conscious choices about the way we tackle each day.

Before you begin your first appointment or meeting, take a few moments to look—really look—at your calendar for the day. Is there room to attend to what is important? Have you allotted time for taking care of yourself physically and emotionally? Are you doing some things simply out of habit, but that have no real importance to you?

When we spend most of our time putting out fires, we can't attend to what is important—strategically or personally. It's depleting and ultimately not sustainable. Besides, many fires burn themselves out harmlessly without any intervention at all. So, if you haven't been making time in your schedule for what's important to you and to your work, experiment with making one small change to your calendar each day. This may take some courage at first, but if there is no catalyst, nothing transforms. Be disciplined about this practice until it becomes a habit. And never underestimate the ripple effect of those small changes.



4 Power Lunch, Anyone?

The words "power lunch" used to conjure up an image of men in expensive business suits gathering in an upscale restaurant to drink, eat, and make a deal. In this lunch, the power is about taking a purposeful pause to actually set aside time to nourish your body, connect with some colleagues or friends, and punch a hole in the constant busyness of the day.

First, look at your calendar and block out time to eat lunch every day. This can be the most difficult step. We often forgo lunch because we're too busy. Take charge of making the time to fuel your body.

Next, invite some colleagues or friends to join you. Spending time cultivating connections with people fuels the mind and heart. When we engage in conversation and feel the connections we have with others, it helps us get out of our overly busy, thinking mind. As you eat, take in the tastes, smells, colors, and textures of your food.

Tip

Don't just slavishly follow what your calendar tells you to do. Carefully look at the whole week or month. Does the shape of it make sense? Adjust accordingly.

DANIL NEVSKY/STOCKSY

5 Walk it Off

The day is well underway when you notice that a familiar tightness in your neck and shoulders has returned, or you feel your heart racing as your mind fills with judgments, worries, and planning. This is a great time to walk it off: Make the simple act of walking—to the break room or the bathroom or to your next meeting or even just around your home—a purposeful pause. Take the time to engage in a mini-practice, to explore once again, as you did over your morning drink, what it's like to nourish your body and mind using a routine, simple act as a prompt for mindfulness.

As you begin to walk, notice your feet touching the floor, how the air feels against your skin, the sounds around you, the expressions on the faces of the people that you pass, etc.

Any time you begin to see your mind replaying something that happened, or worrying about something that might, simply notice the thinking and redirect your attention back to your body's experience of walking.

Janice Marturano is founder and executive director of the Institute for Mindful Leadership.



RUTH BLACK/STOCKSY


the simple joy of writing by hand

Coloring for relaxation is all the rage now. Handwriting can provide the same reward, and stimulate the brain in ways that typing simply does not. It can also be a meditative practice.

By Barbara Bash

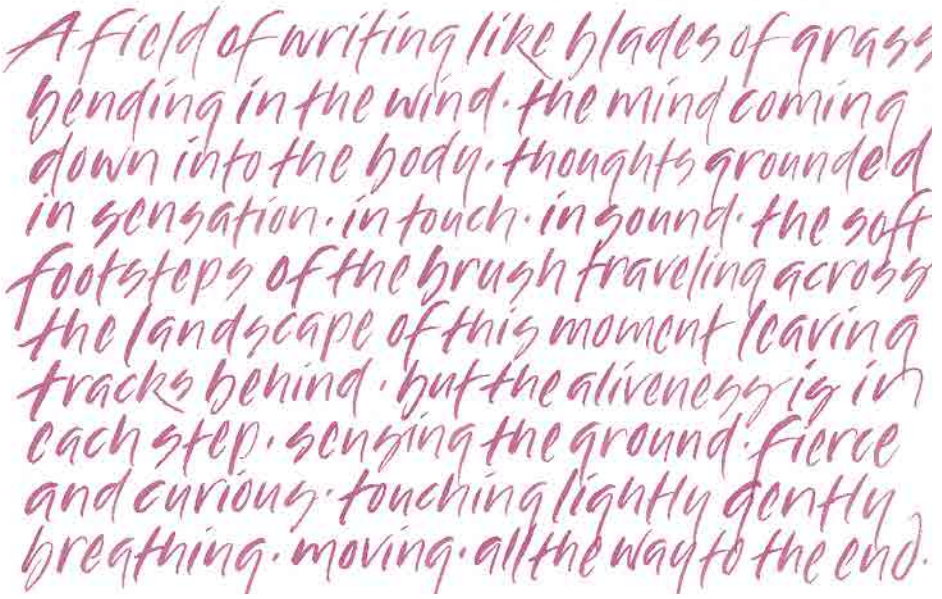
Have you noticed that we are writing by hand less and less these days? Sometimes it's just a signature with a blunt stylus at the grocery store, or your finger signing crudely on a credit card pay screen. Handwriting certainly looks like a dying form, as we type away merrily on our keyboards, or respond in our new form of texting code.

Is this withering away of handwriting a problem? Or is it simply the inevitable unfolding of language forms evolving over the centuries, from oral to written to printed, and now electronic?

I believe that handwriting still serves a deep purpose in our lives and that letting it fade away will be a loss to our spirit. Precisely because it is no longer essential for communication, handwriting can now be free to express its true nature as an embodied practice of creative expression, a synchronization of mind and body.

It's also good for our brains, as researchers are now discovering. One study, at Indiana University, asked children who had not yet learned to read or write to draw a letter freehand, trace the same letter from a dotted outline, and press the correct key that corresponded to that letter on a computer keyboard. Measurements showed stronger brain activity from the freehand drawing, firing off in three different areas, while the tracing and typing motions barely stimulated the brain at all. Other research suggests that children who write are able to generate ideas more easily, and that older students seem to retain information better when they take lecture notes by hand. Apparently there is something about the messiness of writing, its variable nature, that wakes us up, fires the synapses, brings us to the task at hand.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BARBARA BASH



Whether you enjoy your handwriting or are embarrassed and uncomfortable with it, getting on the page each day with some "slow writing" can open your channels of creativity and keep them humming. This is not about improving your handwriting, any more than meditation is about improving your character (though both may happen as a side benefit!). It's a practice of seeing ourselves through how we write, allowing our handwriting, and ourselves, to be unique, quirky, imperfect—and appreciated.

When I write by hand, the familiar shapes tumble out and make new combinations. But it is something about the physical act—the holding of the hand and pen—that is meditative, bringing me into the present. The body sensations are the foundation; the moving line the breath that keeps flowing along. And the words that show up on the page are the thoughts taking shape, the weather appearing on the horizon. It is this physical aspect of writing—the sitting down and listening through the body, the hand, the pen—that can bring forth something substantial and true.

I'm not suggesting we abandon our computers and return to pen and paper. (Though taking the time to write a thoughtful handwritten letter can be a really nourishing activity.) What I am proposing is that handwriting can become a contemplative practice, a generator of insight, a deepening down activity that counterbalances the vast, rapidly moving digital world we're bathed in. Handwriting is a powerfully simple way to bring natural creativity and connection back into our lives.

Barbara Bash is a calligrapher, illustrator, author and performance artist.

Put Pen to Paper

1 Sit down with a couple sheets of paper in front of you and a pen that you like to write with. Feel your fingers holding the pen, your hand resting on the paper, your arm ready to guide, your feet on the floor or your back resting on the seat. At the top of the page write the words, "When I write by hand," and then notice what shows up in your mind. It could be a memory from childhood of learning to write—or a cramping in your fingers from the unfamiliar movements!—or something about the sound of the pen touching, pausing, gliding along on the page. Describe in writing whatever it is, following the associations until you come to a pause in your thoughts. Write the prompt again, "When I write by hand . . . " and head off, letting the words tumble forth, not concerned with making full sentences or perfect punctuation or spelling.

2 Now, let your writing slow down. See how the forms change with this shift of speed. Notice how you're feeling.

3 Fill up two sheets of paper, or write for 10 minutes, then read what has come through. Where did you start? Where did you end up? You're involved in an age-old act of bringing the loftiness of thought—what the ancient Chinese called "heaven"—down to the practicality of "earth." Joining "heaven and earth" through human expression is the essence of art.



MARIJA SAVIC/STOCKSY

Rise up, Tune in

A simple yet powerful yoga practice to awaken the body, quiet the mind, and listen to yourself.

By Kaitlin Quistgaard



A short moving meditation can be a gentle way to welcome a new day or rebalance yourself between meetings on a busy afternoon. Try this sequence when you want to clean your internal slate of distractions and emotions. Like seated meditation, this practice powerfully focuses the mind. Asking it to concentrate at once on both breath and movement, you'll find that your mind has less room to wander, and quickly clears itself of too much thinking.



Stand with feet spread about the same width as your hips, toes pointed straight ahead. Take a moment to stretch in any way that feels good—arms overhead, leaning to each side, folding at the waist, or swinging your arms side to side in a gentle twist.



Return to relaxed standing with arms at your sides and eyes closed. You might sway a little—if it's too hard to find your balance with eyes closed, keep them open. Notice your breath and simply follow it as it moves in and out, for several breaths. How are you feeling? Tired or lethargic? Agitated? Consumed by emotion? Hungry? Note the feelings, without judgment, and return to following the breath. After several breaths, open your eyes and begin to move.



On an inhalation, sweep your arms out to the sides and up, until your fingers touch above your head.

Exhale and reverse the motion, moving your arms out and back down as you fold gently at the waist, as if bending to touch your toes. Let your hands come to rest on your knees or shins, elbows slightly bent.

Inhale and straighten your arms, elongating your spine and reaching the crown of your head forward while your gaze looks downward.

Exhale and fold back down toward your legs. Keep your hands on your shins or knees, or let them hang, like a rag doll. Your knees can be slightly bent.

Inhale and sweep your arms out to the sides and upward as you gently rise back up to standing, your spine unfurling vertebra by vertebra, until your hands once again touch above your head.

Exhale as you bring your arms down to chest level, keeping the hands together in a "prayer" position. Then relax your arms and let your hands drop to your sides.

Take a full breath, in and out. If you like, close your eyes and take another.

CHRISTINE HEWITT/STOCKSY



Once you've completed this series of movements (a Half Sun Salutation), start again: Sweeping your arms up on the inhalation, folding over on the exhalation, elongating the spine and reaching the head forward on the inhalation, folding in on the exhalation, rolling up on the inhalation, coming back to standing on the exhalation and taking a full breath. Then do it again.

After just three of these, you may want to stop and check in. Has some of the tension in your shoulders and neck eased? Have your legs, torso, and arms gently stretched? Has your thinking mind quieted down as it focuses on the movement? Is your breathing a little deeper, slower, or smoother? How are you are feeling now—differently from before you began?



If you're enjoying the experience and its effects, try doing the sequence 10 times. Eyes open or closed, you can flow through the postures incredibly slowly, aware of each micro-movement, or quickly, to get breath and body moving. You can imagine drawing calm in on the inhale and releasing tension on the exhale.



Finish your practice standing, eyes closed, face relaxed, keeping your awareness on your breath.

Tailor the practice to your needs each day. Asking "What movement would feel good in this moment?" can be the beginning of taking better care of and cultivating more intimacy with yourself. If emotions or revelations bubble to the surface, take time to explore them.

Don't be too demanding by forcing yourself to stretch more or move faster than what feels good. If last week you touched your ankles and today you can only reach your knees, just note the difference. This is a perfect moment to practice compassion for yourself. Instead of, *How can I do better?* try, *How can I give myself what I need to feel my best?*

Kaitlin Quistgaard is an editor-at-large for Mindful.

PAUSE

Savor a Bit of Silence

Everyday life can be noisy. Taking time away from talking or other inputs may seem strange and austere at first, but it brings pleasurable relief.

Silence practice is not only about cutting back on the noise that comes into our ears; it's also about cutting back on the noise that distracts us from ourselves. It also means not sharing whenever thoughts come into our heads. When this happens, with a little mindfulness added in, we can improve our filter about what might be worth sharing and what might be better kept to ourselves. Here are some tips to help you enjoy some quiet time.

1. If possible, try to pick a few hours, a whole morning or afternoon, or even an entire day to dedicate to being quiet.

2. If you live with other people, and they won't be offended or weirded out, let them know you're taking time to enjoy peace and quiet without conversation.

3. Can you take a short trip to a quiet place where you can walk in peace and find places to just sit? If you like, you can do some mindfulness meditation while you're there, both while you're sitting and while you're walking. If you encounter others, simply nod hello.

4. When you're with other people during a quiet time or you run into someone, you can keep the talking functional and to a minimum (without being rude). When your short and simple conversation is over, return to being quiet.

5. If possible, try not to look at your computer, phone or other devices during your quiet time. If something requires you to get online, try to keep it to the minimum necessary rather than getting drawn into lengthy social media jags or complex and possibly emotional email threads.

6. As you begin to spend more time without talking or absorbing extraneous input, listen for things you don't normally hear: a roar in the distance, birdsong, wind. First, try to identify a sound, and then, try listening without labeling what it is ("That's thunder," "That's a bird," etc.). Just notice and enjoy the sound itself. Hearing can also be a whole body experience. If you have some ringing in your ears, avoid obsessing about it. That's common to notice when things are quiet.

7. Lastly, in times of quiet, you sometimes notice a few things: a thirst for entertainment, the loud voice of your inner critic, edginess and irritability. If you let them pass whenever they arise, you may find a natural restfulness resides underneath all of that noise.

Make Room

When it comes to designing the perfect home, architect Sarah Susanka knows that a beautiful place to call your own trumps size every time.

By Sam Littlefair Wallace

More than 20 years ago, architect Sarah Susanka made a radical suggestion: Maybe the key to happiness isn't a palatial house filled with hordes of stuff; rather, happiness comes from finding inspiration in the little things. The inspiration hit when she made a small change in her own home: She turned her attic into a space where she could be alone and do what she loved. At the time, that was mostly meditation. "Everything started to shift," she recalls. That's when she began to write her seminal book *Not So Big House* and the following series.

A Place of Your Own, or Poyo, as Susanka dubbed it, can't be underestimated for nourishing the creativity the lives inside each of us. It's a space that truly reflects you—and where you can simply be yourself. As you spend time there, you learn about your interior world. "It tends to wake up something inside you," Susanka says. "It's a place that allows you to express the part of yourself that normally doesn't get to breathe."

A Poyo could be an attic or spare room, a loft, a window seat, even a screened-off section of a bedroom. Big or small, it doesn't matter, but it should be private. You can fill it with sentimental items, supplies for your hobby, or just one thing you really love. The most important thing is to make it your own.

Read on to learn what the author shares about rightsizing, downsizing, and determining what kind of space will be just right for you.

TRINETTE REED/STOCKSY





On house design

When I'm designing a house, I try to make sure every square foot is lived in every day. I also try to help the house become an expression of useful beauty. Think of a well-designed window seat. If it's beautifully crafted, it invites you to sit there. It's small, but it becomes the treasure of the house. It's charming, and it makes you want to sit down and relax. And I'm trying to make houses that make you want to say, "I'm safe. I'm sheltered. I can sit and enjoy the views. I'm home."

Rightsizing and downsizing

Contrary to what people expect, rightsizing doesn't start with a notion of size, but with the question, "What do I need? What do I love?" What grows out of that is rightsized. Your quality of life is based on how you are in your space, not the size of it. So, when I say, "not so big," it's got a paradox right in the name. Because what I'm really trying to get people to see is that it's not about the size at all. Some people think 1,200 square feet is way too big and others think 3,000 square feet is too small. I'm not there to judge. I'm there to help them discover what's right.

I worked with a woman who had two large rugs that were her mother's, and so she loved them dearly. For her, rightsizing included those pieces of her past.

A lot of the population has gone overboard. We've got more space and stuff than we need. We've equated more quantity with the notion of a better life. That's a lie. When humans were living in very small, cramped spaces, bigger was probably an improvement. But there's a point at which more square footage does not make a better life. We passed that point, most of us, quite a ways back.

Listen to your body

You have to observe yourself in different spaces to discover what feels right to you. You need to pay attention to what your body tells you about a space and its size.

For example, sometimes a client feels uncomfortable sitting with their back to the door—they don't like not knowing what's going on behind them. Knowing that, I might design them a different shape of room. I might orient the kitchen table differently, so that the longer sides are in an alcove, and maybe even put the kitchen island close by, to give a sense of protection.

My "inner office" is a room in the roof of my house with a sloped ceiling. At the center it's about 8 feet. I love it. But I have clients who would go nuts in this type of space because they feel cramped.

I have clients keep a little journal of places they love, memories, friends' houses, and pictures from magazines. If you pay attention, you can learn quite a bit about what makes you feel comfortable or uncomfortable. And this becomes more important, the smaller the space.

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Pause to breathe

Breathing space refers to the place where you take a pause before you move into another space. In many older and smaller houses, you enter the front door and bam! you're right in the main living space. That's an example of no breathing space. You can feel very awkward there. If you have a very tiny landing space at the top of the stairs before you go into a bedroom, the house feels cramped. Adding some extra square footage to the landing area might seem like a waste, but it's not. It gives you the opportunity to transition before you move into the bedrooms. A lot of what I talk about is paradoxical, because it's not useful in our normal way of thinking. And yet, psychologically, it's incredibly important.

The joy scale

Making your home beautiful is a very big step in making it sustainable. When people love the place they live, they look after it. On a design level, when something is beautiful and tailored to the right scale, your everyday life is enhanced tremendously. One: It reflects you back to yourself in a way that brings joy and peace into your life. Two: Our lives are enhanced by living in something in which we have had creative expression.

Fundamentally, I want people to see that they can have a very big life by focusing on meaningfulness. That's what you remember when you're on your deathbed. It doesn't matter how many cars you've had or how big your house was. If you've lived a meaningful life, that's what matters.

Sam Littlefair Wallace is the editor of LionsRoar.com.

✻ MINDFUL POLL

WHAT TAKES UP THE MOST ROOM IN YOUR HOUSE?

31% books
21% clothes
10% useless junk
4% toys

WHAT DO YOU STRUGGLE TO GET RID OF?

Kitchen gadgets
Old greeting cards
Unfinished projects
Electronics

68% say their home is just the right size
18% say it's too small
14% say it's too big

TRINETTE REED/STOCKSY



Confessions of a Recovering Insomniac

One woman recounts her (successful) struggle to get a decent night's rest.

By Barbara Graham

Here's a story that until very recently I told myself about the insomnia that has plagued me for 30 years: "My body doesn't know how to sleep. There's obviously something very wrong with me. The only way I can fall asleep is to take a pill, and sometimes the only way to stay asleep is to take another pill. I hate how groggy the pills make me, but I am helpless and powerless to stop taking them. If I try, I'll never sleep. I'll be a complete wreck and fall apart and not be able to live up to my responsibilities. Sooner or later the lack of sleep will make me sick and die."

This was the story I told myself night after night under cover of darkness, believing it to be the absolute, immutable truth, not a made-up tale spinning in my mind. In the morning I'd tell myself another story, depending on how many hours of sleep I'd had, usually ranging from three or four on a bad night to sixish on a good one. Soon after I awoke, I'd feel the rumblings of anxiety about the night ahead. I'd try to calculate: How many Xanax—an anti-anxiety benzodiazepine, my drug of choice—would I need? One? One and a half? Or could I get by with just a half? The panic would build throughout the day and peak as bedtime neared.

I worried constantly about the long-term effects of the drugs on my mind and body, and took frequent stabs at rewriting my story. I'd try the latest, supposedly less harmful, wonder drug. When that didn't work, the natural supplement and herbal sleep aid

SIMONE BECCHETTI/STOCKSY





industry made a pile off of me. I meditated, aerobicized, did tai chi, qigong, and yoga, consulted acupuncturists, shrinks, energy healers, and Reiki masters. There were even periods—weeks or even months at a time—when, miraculously, I slept unaided. But then I'd have a pressing deadline, an overseas trip, a big meeting and the story would return full-blown. Within a night or two, I was again the victim of my own dark and doom-filled narrative, abetted by my doctors. The prevailing wisdom was that it was better to take a pill and get some sleep than to spend the night tossing and turning. One physician even told me not to worry, I could take a little Xanax every night for the rest of my life, no harm in it. I wanted to believe him.

According to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, as many as 30–35% of adults complain of insomnia. The percentages spike to 40–60% in people over 60. Women are twice as likely as men to have trouble falling or staying asleep—the two sides of the insomnia coin. Only a third of Americans get the standard recommended eight hours of sleep a night. The Centers for Disease Control has labeled insufficient sleep a "public health epidemic," and estimates that 50–70 million adults in the US suffer from a sleep or wakefulness disorder. In a report issued in 2014, it warned that people who get too little sleep are at risk for increased mortality, as well as chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, obesity, and depression. Sleep deprivation is also strongly linked to impaired immune function.

Researchers at University of California, Berkeley found that sleep deprivation fires up the brain's amygdala and insular cortex, regions associated withemotional processing. The resulting pattern mimics the abnormal neural activity seen in anxiety disorders. Not surprisingly, "those people who are anxious by nature [hello!] are the same people who will suffer the greatest harm from sleep deprivation," one study author said.

Another study, by the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics revealed that nearly 9 million adults in the United States take prescription sleep aids—a number that is on the rise—with women leading the pack.

The news just gets worse.

A study reported by French and Canadian researchers suggests that benzodiazepine use is linked to higher rates of Alzheimer's disease, and that the correlation increases with greater exposure to the drugs.

The researchers found that older adults who took daily doses for 91–180 days had an increased risk of 32%; those who popped benzos daily for more than 180 days had an increased risk of 84%.

These researchers were talking days, not years, and I'd been taking the stuff for the better part of 30 years—that's 10,000 days, give or take. I completely freaked out.

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What's more, the risks are just as great for the newer generation of Z-drugs (zolpidem, eszopiclone, zaleplon—i.e., Ambien, Lunesta, and Sonata), as for older benzos like Halcion, Dalmane, and Restoril and Xanax.

And, I learned from watching UC Berkeley's Matt Walker in a YouTube video called "The Mysteries of Sleep," the sort of shuteye you get from taking hypnotics is really sedation, not true sleep—and lacks the essential benefits to the body and brain that occur during natural sleep cycles.

Obviously, I needed a new story—fast. But I knew it wouldn't be easy.

"Often, when people try to go off these meds, they worry that their bodies won't be able to sleep on their own and they won't get as much rest as they need," said James Lettenberger, a Washington, DC psychopharmacologist. "It can definitely be done, but to be successful people need both a strong desire to stop taking the medication, and the belief that they can."

I had the desire, but would I be able to change my belief system—my story—something I'd been unable to accomplish in the past?

Sick joke: Which is worse, the dementia you get from taking sleeping pills or the dementia you get from sleep deprivation?

Though I was still determined to sleep drug-free, I cut myself some slack. Clearly, healing my sleep disorder was going to be a process, not a quick fix. And I needed help. I talked to an holistic doctor and an acupuncturist, who each suggested herbal remedies, while my more mainstream internist recommended trazodone, a tetracyclic antidepressant that has some side effects, but doesn't seem to rot your brain like hypnotics do. These things helped some, as did my morning meditation and a soothing bedtime visualization recording made for me by a psychotherapist. Still, I continued to resort to hypnotics off and on, especially when I felt stressed.

For the past several years, the gold standard, non-pharmaceutical treatment for insomnia has been Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia—or CBTI, which in numerous studies has been shown to be more effective than sleeping pills. In fact, CBTI is now recommended as the number one treatment for chronic insomnia by t he National Institutes of Health.

The program is based on a simple concept: Insomnia is caused by learned thoughts and behaviors that can be unlearned or changed. In other words, it deals directly with the story.

Although there are sleep clinics that offer CBTI where I live, I decided to try an online program that's available to anyone, anywhere, at anytime. For less than $45, I signed up for it, and got the five-week program, plus a few extras, including evaluation of my weekly sleep diary by Dr. Gregg Jacobs, an insomnia specialist at the University of Massachusetts Memorial Medical Center.

The basic drill, week by week, is this: 1) education about the stages and functions of sleep; 2) sleep scheduling and stimulus control (don't spend too much time in bed awake, and only sleep or have sex there); 3) cognitive restructuring and medication reduction 4) daytime relaxation tips and stress-reducing attitudes and beliefs; 5) bedtime relaxation techniques and lifestyle practices for improving sleep.

In case I thought I was special, I learned that the themes in my personal narrative were among the 10 most common negative thoughts about sleep. For example, a corrective to *I will never fall asleep* is *My brain wants to obtain my core sleep (5.5 hours—and I most likely will)*. An antidote to *I will not be able to function tomorrow* belief is *Sleep loss does not always have a significant impact on my functioning.*

I began relying less on the pills and sleeping more or less the way I imagined normal people do.

And I realized that by practicing mindfulness meditation in tandem with CBTI, I was loosely practicing my own version of a newer approach that shows great promise: Mindfulness-Based Therapy for Insomnia—or MBTI.

"Insomnia is a disorder of cognitive and physiological hyperarousal, which mindfulness addresses but CBTI doesn't deal with directly," said Jason Ong, a psychologist at Rush University Medical Center.

And, yes, I sleep. Drug-free, I sleep. Not always as many hours as I'd like, sometimes fitfully, yet I sleep. For the most part, sleep has become what it's designed to be—rest and recuperation for body and brain—and I would add, spirit. On nights when I'm having trouble, my little herbal cocktail—melatonin and the L's, tryptophan and glycine—help. On other nights I need to talk myself down, like a parent to an anxious child, placing my hand over my heart and reminding myself that my body does indeed know how to sleep. And when I have a really lousy night, I don't panic the way I used to.

The expectation that I will sleep is what made all the difference. So has realizing that, like many people who struggle with insomnia, I had swallowed some pretty basic myths. For starters, the notion that we need eight hours of shuteye every night: Recent studies involving over a million people found that those who sleep seven hours live longer than people who sleep eight or

As many as **30–35%** of adults complain of insomnia. That spikes to **40–60%** in people over 60, and women are twice as likely as men to have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep.

People who took more than **132** sleeping pills a year had a **35%** increased risk of developing cancer within **2.5** years.

7 hours of sleep = stronger cognitive skills
A landmark study of **15,000** female nurses found that women who got an average of **7** hours of sleep each night had significantly stronger cognitive skills later in life than those who slept less than **5** hours or more than **9**.

more. Even more surprising, sleeping five hours a night is associated with longer life expectancy than sleeping nine hours. And seven (some studies suggest that the range is between 6.5 and 7.5) hours per night appears to be the sweet spot. The same number holds true for preserving memory. A landmark study of 15,000 female nurses conducted at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Massachusetts found that women who slept an average of seven hours each night had significantly stronger cognitive skills later in life than those who slept less than five hours or more than nine.

Perhaps the most liberating of the debunked myths is the discovery that the belief we hold so dear—namely, that we should sleep undisturbed in eight-hour chunks—is a relatively recent development in human evolution. In 2001 Roger Ekirch, a history professor at Virginia Tech, published a paper revealing a wealth of historical evidence showing that for millennia—until there was artificial light—humans slept in two segments, usually referred to as the first and second sleep. The time between the two chunks was often devoted to prayer, meditation, quiet reflection—and it was also notably the hour when many babies were conceived. Ekirch's hypothesis, based on 16 years of research, was backed by an experiment conducted by psychiatrist Thomas Wehr, a prominent scientist at the National Institute of Mental Health. In Wehr's study, subjects were plunged into darkness 14 hours a day for one month. After adapting to the new schedule, they typically slept for four hours, and then awoke for one or two hours before falling into a second fourish-hour snooze.

In *Waking Up to the Dark*, author Clark Strand writes: "As a result of Wehr's study and others like it, some sleep specialists have reported that the best treatment for the Hour of the Wolf [Strand's term for middle-of-the-night agita] is to tell patients that nightly waking is natural and, consequently, that they shouldn't struggle against it. A doctor told me that once he explained this to them, many of his patients simply went to bed earlier each night and never asked him for sleep medications again."

A glowing new spin on a damaging old story.

Barbara Graham is an author, journalist, and playwright.

* MINDFUL POLL

WHAT METHOD DO YOU USE TO SLEEP?

42% body scan
24% cup of chamomile tea
14% sedative
12% nightcap
6% count sheep

IDEAL SLEEPING CONDITION?

64% in a king-size bed in a luxury hotel
20% on warm sand with a gentle breeze
6% in a tent



CLAUDIA GUARIGLIA/STOCKSY

Sleep Reminders

Here are a few mindfulness principles to explore if you need help falling back asleep from Jason Ong.

Beginner's mind

Remember: Each night is a new night. Be open and try something different! What you have been doing to this point is probably not working well.

Non-striving

Sleep is a process that cannot be forced but instead, should be allowed to unfold. Putting more effort into sleeping longer or better is counterproductive.

Letting go

Attachment to sleep or your ideal sleep needs usually leads to worry about the consequences of sleeplessness. This is counterproductive and inconsistent with the natural process of letting go of the day to allow sleep to come.

Non-judging

It is easy to automatically judge the state of being awake as negative and aversive, especially if you do not sleep well for several nights. However, this negative energy can interfere with the process of sleep. One's relationship to sleep can be a fruitful subject of meditation.

Acceptance

Recognizing and accepting your current state is an important first step. If you can accept that you are not in a state of sleepiness and sleep is not likely to come soon, why not get out of bed? Many people who have trouble sleeping avoid getting out of bed. Unfortunately, spending long periods of time awake in bed might condition you to being awake in bed.

Trust

Trust that your mind and body can self regulate and self correct for sleep loss. Knowing that short consolidated sleep often feels more satisfying than longer fragmented sleep can help you develop trust in your sleep system. Also, sleep debt can promote good sleep as long as it is not associated with increased effort to sleep.



alive

"Isn't it amazing that there's air to breathe,
a body to take it in, and a mind to watch it?
Each moment we're interested in the process of breathing,
we are training ourselves in curiosity."

—Ed Halliwell



SIMONE BECCHETTI/STOCKSY



Goof Off Now ... Really

Even leisure and relaxation can get tied up in seriousness, busyness, betterment. Maybe the trick is to stop trying so hard.

By Sallie Tisdale

When was the last time you really goofed off? All the dictionary definitions of this phrase are negative: "shirking work or responsibility," "to waste time." But to me, goofing off simply means activity with no redeeming value—it satisfies no "should." You do it without excuses; there is no justification. Goofing off like this is harder than it sounds because it means acting without a goal, without thought of gain.

Real goofing off may provoke reactions in others—a little censure, even envy—precisely because it is hard for us to do. From an early age we are conditioned against shirking, and that conditioning doesn't stop. We are even told that relaxing is a project we have to work at: "Choose to practice relaxation," I read in one book. "Make these relaxation tools work for you. Regular, consistent practice is essential if you want to gain maximum benefit from these skills."

Dancing in the park on a summer evening is goofing off. Walking 10,000 steps a day with a pedometer is not.

There's nothing wrong with walking 10,000 steps a day—it's good for you. But worrying all the time about what's good for you is not. The pressure we feel to be doing something, anything, all the time, is intense. Modern life, even at its most ordinary, is rich with temptation and possibility. Our days are filled with the promise of little extras. So many things we could be doing instead of what we are doing—or, worse perhaps, on top of what we are already doing. We feel such pressure to be connected—to spend time on social media or stay current with news and events or the changing culture or just the details of many other people's lives. Add in families, work, travel, exercise, volunteering, meditation practice, the myriad maintenance activities of day-to-day life, and what you might

BONNINSTUDIO/STOCKSY



call enrichment—the painting class, practicing your Spanish—and your day is full.

If you're anything like me, there are times you feel powerless about this. So much of this busyness feels externally imposed—because I'm forgetting how much of it I've actually chosen.

I'm convinced there is an addictive property to all this effort, this stimulation. Addiction is what happens when you need to insulate or buffer yourself against experience or sensation. Social media, multitasking, even enrichment can be very effective at this.

An important aspect of mindfulness is becoming aware of the obstacles you put in your own way. How much of your time is spent lost in thoughts of the past or future—or sideways, in all those other things you could or should be doing? What happens to your mind when you have nothing to do? When you are, in fact, goofing off. Can you bring the beginner's curious and open mind to that?

Walking aimlessly through a meadow full of wildflowers is goofing off. Gardening is not. Not that there's anything wrong with gardening. It's just that there is no point in working in our garden if we can't enjoy flowers that bloom all by themselves.

The most profound joy—and the deepest laughter—come from a wholly examined relationship to the world. Being able to goof off is not just a matter of humor or laughing or being silly. Goofing off is the ability to stop being purposeful, to drop the attachment to goals. The trick is not trying to do nothing; the trick is to stop trying to do anything.

This is true mindfulness: just give everything else up, cut all other ties, do nothing but experience and enjoy the moment. Do nothing else.

Writing this essay is not goofing off. Later, sitting on the deck in the afternoon sun—that's goofing off. Mindful, wholehearted, joyful—goofing off.

Sallie Tisdale is a writer and the author of Violation: Collected Essays.

GABRIEL (GABI) BUCATARU/STOCKSY

PRACTICE

Stuck in a Rut?

Snap out of the fog of routine and invite a fresh perspective.

By Ed Halliwell

1

Take an unfamiliar route to work, or to a regular appointment. Or, change your mode of transport—if you usually drive, take the bus, train, or walk. Be curious about what new things you encounter along the way.

2

Follow a recipe for a meal you've never tried, with at least one ingredient you've not before cooked with. Read a different newspaper/news site to the one you're used to—perhaps one that doesn't confirm your usual political views.

3

Start a conversation with someone you've never really talked with: the barista making your coffee or someone from a different department in your company who you sometimes see in the elevator—ask them how their day is going and be prepared to listen with interest.

4

Go to the movie theater without checking what films are showing. Watch the first one in your preferred genre that starts after your arrival. (If you're concerned about wasting money on a bad movie, hit the matinee.)

5

Join a class for a sport, activity, or hobby that you think you won't enjoy. Keep an open mind and resolve to find out one new thing about this activity from the teacher or other participants. Can you discover what others find engaging about it?

6

Turn off all internet connections for one day. Be open to alternative means of finding out information and connecting with others and the world.

Ed Halliwell is a mindfulness teacher and author of Into The Heart of Mindfulness.

Come to Your Senses

Tuning into our ability to see, hear, smell, touch, and taste brings the world into vibrant focus.

By Carolyn Gimian

To be alive is miraculous. To truly appreciate life, we need to perceive, to feel—to sense our world. We rely on our sense organs (our eyes, ears, noses, tongues, skin) to be sensitive to light, vibrations, touch, or the very molecules that make up scents and tastes. Then we translate this stimuli into electrical signals that travel via the nervous system to specific areas in the brain. Those signals are then interpreted into fully formed perceptions.

It truly is astounding that we can communicate so intimately and accurately with the world around us by means of our senses. Yet we tend to take the information they provide for granted. Mindfulness helps us connect more directly with sense perceptions, bringing us fully into the present moment. In mindfulness meditation, by sitting quietly and attending to our breath, we slow down. We aren't being dragged around by our thoughts.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY WHOOLI CHEN





Mindfulness in everyday life provides an opportunity to pay extraordinary attention to ordinary sounds, sights, tastes, smells, and touches, many of which we normally overlook. Have you ever really heard your refrigerator? What does the paper in your office printer smell like? Have you noticed the bright red lipstick your coworker is wearing today?

In modern urban life, we suffer from both sensory deprivation and sensory overload. The deprivation comes partly from the narrowing of our physical environment: we ride the same bus or subway every day to work; we sit at a desk, staring into a computer screen. At night, we go home and often stare into more screens. It's no wonder we crave sensory experiences, seeking out the best coffee, vegetables, or olive oil while we take up gardening, knitting, or cycling, or we head to the gym, the bar, or the clubs at 11 pm.

On the other hand, we're bombarded by the excessive sensory input of urban life. Construction noise, bad air, traffic jams, crowds everywhere—we're so busy



going nowhere. No surprise that we also dream of a beach vacation with no agenda or drink ourselves into oblivion on the weekend. Politics, money, relationships, parenting, and jobs all create stress, and stress tends to deaden us and dull our perceptions.

We can't go on vacation every day or every week, so finding the space and the aliveness within everyday activities seems essential. This is where our senses can really serve us. With all the stresses and strains that we face, our senses can show us and support us in taking a more open and balanced approach to everyday life. These openings to the world are inexpensive. In fact, they freely transmit the beauty, power, and richness of the world.

Sight

Vision is our overwhelmingly dominant sense. As much as 80 percent of what we learn comes through our eyes. When you look at something, you may think you're seeing the object, the thing itself, but you're really seeing light reflected from that object. (Unless something is actually self-luminous, like a light bulb.) We only see a narrow spectrum of light, which does not include ultraviolet, infrared, x-rays, or other wavelengths. Yet, within this narrow band of perceived reality, we have discovered planets, solar systems, and galaxies. We have looked inward at cells and molecules. We have painted masterpieces.

A mindful approach to seeing is being in the present, without judgment, and taking a fresh look at the world, one that broadens our perception. Our habitual approach is to make judgments that narrow what we see. We accept this and reject that. We like blue but we hate pink. This person is our friend, but that guy is a "jerk." We have no idea what the "jerk" is wearing. We don't notice how sad he is.

Or we may see the forest, the overview, and not the trees. When we're looking for our car in a parking lot, we don't notice the other vehicles or whether there are clouds in the sky.

Our habitual patterning often leads to pigeonholing, limiting our vision, both literally and metaphorically. But some habitual patterning is essential. Our brains organize visual input into patterns that allow us to recognize what we see. Our brains tell us that the soft red layered ball with a green stick coming out of it, emitting a sweet smell, is actually a rose.

For one moment, it might be worth seeing the petals, feeling their softness, inhaling the scent—experiencing the rose rather than simply labeling it. That's where mindfulness comes in.

TRY THIS: Stand quietly with mindfulness, with your eyes open. Don't focus on any one thing; simply notice what is in your visual field. You see colors and shapes. You see movement, shadows, light passing across the room or the landscape. Then very slowly turn your whole body from left to right and then from right to left.



Take five minutes to complete one pass. Then, look ever so slowly from top to bottom, and then from bottom to top. What do you discover? How do you feel before, during, and after?

Sound

Hearing adds a rich dimension to what we experience. It alerts us to approaching danger or a much-anticipated visit. It's an integral part of communication. It delights us with music, while it irritates us with noise pollution. Sound is created by a series of compression waves that travel outward from a source. These waves are carried via a medium—solid, liquid, or gaseous—and are picked up and converted into electrical signals in the inner ear, which then passes them along to the brain. This process happens so quickly and seamlessly that we see and hear almost simultaneously, unless the sound is from far away, like with distant lightning and the associated thunder.

We react with immediacy to so many sounds: toast popping up in a toaster, the bing of a text, a police siren, or the shock of the "breaking" news of the day.

We may be largely unaware of habitual sounds in our lives. Do you hear your own feet thumping on the stairs? Do you hear your shower while you're in it? Do you hear your fingers tapping on a keyboard? We can learn to sleep through traffic noise, human voices, and the sounds of wind and rain. Yet we will awaken quickly if the baby is crying.

Sound is also closely linked to emotion, evoking both joy and sorrow. Think about the music you listen or dance to. Turn off the sound to a TV show and watch with subtitles, and you'll realize how important sound is to your emotional experience of the story.



TRY THIS: We can learn to pay more attention to the soundtrack of our own life. Take a sound walk, where you focus on what you are hearing. Find a place to stop and listen to sounds with your eyes closed.

When you're anxious or stressed, mindfully listening can help you to connect and relax. At work, find a quiet moment to close your eyes and listen to the sounds around you: computer humming, people on the phone, sounds of construction across the street.

Taste

Tasting is an immediate sense: You can't taste the vegetables in your garden from the porch. Adults generally restrict tasting to the food they eat, but infants will put almost anything in their mouths. Taste is obviously an important tool of learning, one that we have to restrict for the child's own safety.

The tongue can identify five basic taste groups: sweet, salty, bitter, sour, and savory. Other tastes that we can identify include metallic, watery, and fatty. We usually think of "flavor" as a product of our taste buds. But in truth, many flavors arise through a unique blend of smell and taste, something known as chemosensation—a fancy word for our body's ability to synthesize chemicals into specific smells and tastes. Chemosensation begins when molecules released by various substances stimulate special nerve cells in the nose, mouth, or throat. Olfactory (smell nerve) cells are stimulated by the odors around us, while gustatory (taste nerve) cells react to food or drink mixed with saliva. These cells transmit messages to the brain via the olfactory and gustatory nerves, and from there our brains identify specific smells and tastes.

It's because of the intimate connection between smell and taste that when we smell a pie cooking in the oven, we can almost taste it.

TRY THIS: Slowly eat four very different foods, such as a nut, a noodle, a piece of lettuce, and a spoonful of ice cream. Close your eyes, if you like. Try to discriminate the textures as well as the taste within each item. Go further: Can you separate the smell from the taste? Or do you have a unified experience of tasting something, combining these senses?

Tip

KEEP A SENSE JOURNAL

Journaling about your senses encourages you to be more aware of them. When you pay extra attention to sensory experience, you also begin to uncover the psychological connections with your physical feelings. Make a daily entry of one experience of each of the five senses. Note any emotions they evoked in you.

Smell

The sense of smell operates across space—you can smell coffee brewing across the room or the smoke from a fire miles away. To produce an odor, a substance must be volatile enough to spray microscopic particles into the air. These molecules travel through the air and into our noses, where 5 million receptor cells reside. These receptors then fire impulses to the brain's olfactory bulb, or smell center.

Smells provide warnings, telling us, for example, that something is burning or that our food has gone bad. Smells also delight us, bringing us the scents of each season: newly mown grass in the spring, or mulled wine in winter.

Smell can also reach across time, connecting us with the past. The nose transmits information about smells via the thalamus to regions of the brain involved in learning and memory, which may explain why odors are so evocative of former events.

TRY THIS: Put a small amount of various loose teas in glasses or small bowls. Close your eyes and smell each sample. You can do this with other foods and drink. Try wine or single malt scotch! Or some herbs and spices. What do you notice?

Touch

Our tactile sense is direct. You can't touch a piece of paper across the room; you can't feel pebbles in your shoes when they're not on your feet. When we

Tip

STROLL DOWN MEMORY LANE

Make a list of 10 events, places and times in your past. Then, while sitting quietly, contemplate how they smelled. Can you remember the smell of your grandmother's kitchen or her garden? Do you remember the smell of the train station, the first time you took the train? When your children were babies, how did they smell when you snuggled them? When you were growing up, do you remember how your dog smelled or your guinea pig's cage smelled? When you contemplate these times and smells, what other memories or emotions are evoked?



touch something, receptors in our skin transmit information via the nervous system to the brain. Our fingers, hands, toes, and feet are particularly sensitive to touch, yet we feel things in every part of the body: an ant on our leg or a hand on our shoulder. Our bodies depend on touch to help orient us in space and to guide movement, whether walking, running, or swimming. Without a sense of touch, we would have a difficult time drinking a glass of water, for example. How would you know when the glass touched your lips if you couldn't feel it?

TRY THIS: Here are three exercises to mindfully explore the sense of touch.

Hands: Touch familiar everyday objects with your eyes closed. Take your time. What does a book feel like? What does the door feel like? The doorknob? A spoon, a teacup, a paper napkin.

Feet: Mindfully feel the texture and temperature of rugs, tile, wooden floors and other surfaces in your house. Outside, feel the grass, the sidewalk, sand in a playground or at the beach.

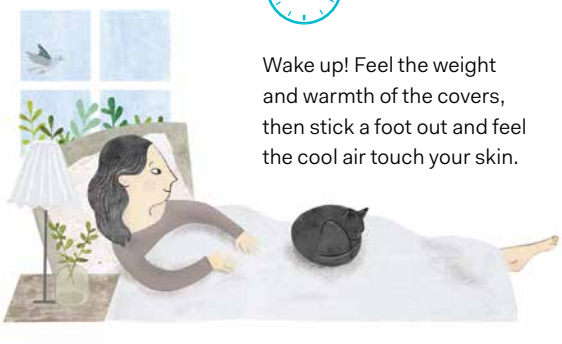
Body: Focus on how water feels in the shower or a bathtub. Feel rain or snow falling on you. What does wind feel like?

Carolyn Gimian is a writer, editor, and teacher of meditation and mindfulness.

Make Today a Sense Adventure!



Set aside a Saturday and let this itinerary inspire you.



Wake up! Feel the weight and warmth of the covers, then stick a foot out and feel the cool air touch your skin.

Take a shower. Listen to the water as it falls. Feel as it rains down upon your head. Really notice the smell of your shampoo. Turn the water to cold and see how long you can handle it—bonus points if you can last a whole minute!

Make some coffee. But before you do, put your nose up to the beans and take a big, deep inhale. Notice if your brain makes any associations as you smell.





Open your front door. Let a little air rush inside and notice how it feels and smells. Then step outside and slowly scan the horizon.

Go for a walk. Wander aimlessly—really, truly aimlessly. Soak in your surroundings without judgment.

Treat yourself. Go out for lunch somewhere you've never been before. Order something you wouldn't normally think to try.

Drink a glass of cold water and try to really taste it. Feel it as it slides down your throat into your stomach.

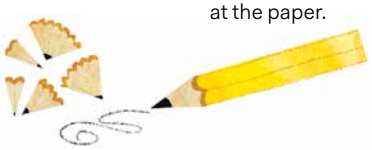
Take a trip to a farmers market to buy ingredients for dinner. Pick up each piece of produce and smell it; feel it in your hands.





Eat dinner—in silence (and keep electronic devices far, far away). Focus all your energy on smelling, seeing, tasting, and feeling the food in your mouth as you chew.

Grab a pencil and paper. Sharpen your pencil, noticing the smell of fresh shavings as you go. Then pick an ordinary object in your house and draw it without ever looking down at the paper.



Go to bed! Feel the cool covers get warmer as your body transmits heat.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY MISSY CHIMOVITZ

PAUSE

Clear Away the Afternoon Fog

5 ways to boost your energy and get your day back on track.

Feeling the mid-afternoon slump? You know, the fog that rolls in sometime between 2-5 pm, without so much as a warning, destroying your will to do anything except curl up in a ball under your desk? You're not alone. The afternoon slump is a real, biological phenomenon that lots of people experience every single day. In fact, it's a sign your internal clock—fluctuations in energy and body temperature regulated by our circadian rhythms—is running on time.

But that doesn't mean the slump has to keep you down. Clear away the haze with a few body-and-brain-boosting tricks—none of which involve pumping yourself full of caffeine or sugar—so you can go forth into the world with a fresh mind.

1

STRETCH

Stretching for even 20 seconds can have a huge effect on your energy levels—particularly if you've been sitting at a desk for hours. Stand up and reach down to touch your toes; bring your hands together and reach above your head; imagine yourself as a cat to deepen your stretch. Just kidding. (Sort of—if you've got a good imagination and like cats, it might help.)

2

CLOSE YOUR EYES FOR TWO FULL MINUTES

It's hard to truly comprehend how much time we spend with our eyes widened by the glaring light of our phones, TVs, and computers. Not only is it physically straining, it's also mentally draining. Place your hands over your eyes for two minutes, and relish the time you have to sit still and be with yourself.

3

TIDY UP

When you create an uplifted environment for yourself, your mind and body follow suit. Take a few minutes to clean up your desk, wash a few dishes, or straighten up your coffee table.

4

CALL A LOVED ONE AND TELL THEM WHY THEY MATTER

It's always worthwhile to extend yourself to others, so pick up the phone and feel your heart swell. It'll make their day better; it'll make your day better.

5

TAKE A WALK

There's nothing like fresh air to perk you up when you're feeling hazy. And if you spend your days in an office building, the air can get pretty stale. Get up and get out—even if you've only got five minutes to spare. It'll get your blood flowing, your muscles moving, and will offer your mind a fresh start.



Still Curious After All These Years

How do you find happiness in aging? Let go of regrets, get interested about what's around the next corner, and dance a little more—and it'll find you all on its own.

By Sue Moon

When I was in my sixties, I wrote a book called *This is Getting Old*, about my experience of aging. I knew I wasn't very old yet, but I wanted to get a head start on facing up to it. After the book came out, I received lots of invitations to talk about the subject. Without meaning to, I became a professional oldster. I had to take a break from it.

Now, I've come back to the topic. I have no choice really—if you keep breathing, you keep getting older.

This is not necessarily bad—especially when you consider the alternative—but it's oddly surprising, the relentlessness of time passing. The days keep going by, marking their passage on your body. You're continually stepping forward into the next piece of your life, going through gate after gate.

The best advice is to stay curious about what's happening. You're alive until you're dead. Each day is another chance. Think of yourself as an explorer. You are going further and deeper. You've never been through this next gate. it's not just more of the same. What will it be?

People in their nineties are likely to boast of their age. They deserve credit for just being alive. But what does it feel like to be really old? That's the blunt question I asked Nancy, a good friend's mother. At 93, she said she had just started thinking of herself as old. "But a couple of months ago I was still taking the bus all over New York, and walking over to the Metropolitan Museum, my home away from home," she told me. From Nancy's point of view, when she was 92, she wasn't old yet.

BONNINSTUDIO/STOCKSY

I asked Nancy how she sustains herself. She said she has a lust for life. She's a devoted New Yorker, and she reads the *New York Times* every day—without glasses! She's an artist. "When I'm in the studio, it's the only time I completely lose myself."

Most of all, she's curious. She loves to learn about people and their interesting lives. She makes new friends all the time—the doorman, store clerk, or physical therapist. "At my age, when you're losing a lot of people, it's important to make new friends. Human beings' stories are endlessly fascinating."

What is it, really, that makes old people happier? A friend of mine and her first love re-met, after not seeing each other for 50 years. They fell in love again in their late sixties. She gave up her old life, her habits, her home and her job, and she moved to Germany to live with him. Now they're married, and they live half the year in Germany, and half the year in California. They are happy. How is this possible? It has to do with going for what's most important. Letting go of constraints and being curious about what's going to happen next.

Theirs is a remarkable story, but for all of us, getting old is about letting go. Of regrets, of unachieved ambitions, of self-centeredness. My ego doesn't whine as much as it used to, and this makes it easier to hear what other people are saying. I can't claim to be completely free of self-concern, but it's getting boring after all these years. And no matter what you have to let go of, no matter what you lose—your hearing, your vision, your memory, your mobility—you don't lose the ability to love. You might even get better at it.

The letting go includes letting go of always wanting to be happy. I was recently complaining to Frieda, a friend who still loves to dance in her seventies, about the fact that my children and grandchildren live so far away. "I would be so much happier if they lived nearby," I said.

Her response shocked me. "Happiness is overrated. You can't always be happy, and that's OK. That's life. Just live your life. You've been unhappy sometimes in the past. Do you regret those parts of your life? Do you regret the experiences that made you unhappy?"

She's right. The more I put happiness aside, the more easily I can settle with what is. The more I let go of being happy, the happier I am. It doesn't matter how old you are.

When you taste your first cup of tea or coffee in the morning, you are neither old nor young. When you walk in the wetlands with a friend and a group of swans take flight, and you hear the amazing clatter of their wings, you are neither old nor young. You are alive. When you are making something—red lentil soup, a valentine for your granddaughter—you are neither old nor young.

Sue Moon is the author of This is Getting Old: Zen Thoughts on Aging with Humor and Dignity.

MIQUEL LLONCH/STOCKSY





ART CREDIT

A Moment of Awe

If you think the world revolves around you, try contemplating a tree.

By Barry Boyce

Each day as I come home from work, I walk on a tree-lined street that's like a small forest. Some days I'm utterly lost in thought, but when possible I try to drink it all in. It's so much more nourishing than looking at a screen. If I had to choose between a tree and a newsfeed—including a newsfeed about beautiful trees—I would choose the tree. Every time.

A friend of mine is an arborist who has long exposed me to the wonders of trees and forests. Whenever we enter the land of trees, almost instantly the mood changes. There is a palpable slowing down of thought and speech. You can hear more, and better. You begin to sense with more of your body, and there is even a preternatural settledness that can easily overtake you. Some psychologists now consider this complex of mental and bodily experiences to be an emotion, which they call awe, and it's considered restorative.

In *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate, Discoveries from a Secret World*, author and forester Peter Wohlleben unfolds the story of why trees are so magnificent and why they affect us. First off, trees are living creatures—not inert objects merely decorating our world. They live, breathe, eat, sleep, make mistakes and learn, communicate, cooperate, and compete, as they ceaselessly reach for light and water.

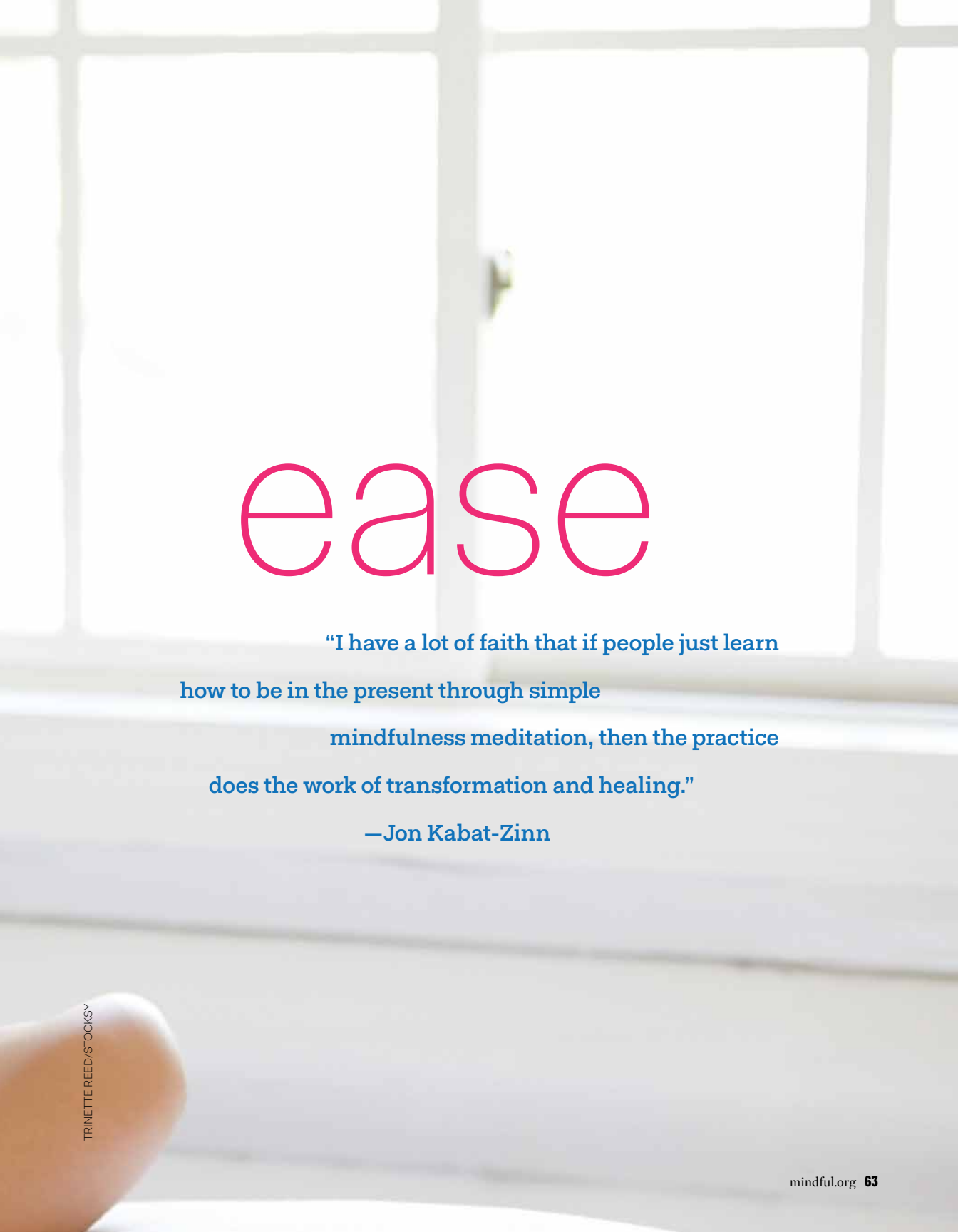
One of the profound ways being amid trees affects us is through the time scale. Youth for many trees starts at 150; old age can be 500 or more. When you spend time around something existing in those kinds of time frames, it can alter your perspective. Perhaps this offers one reason that time spent in the forest lowers blood pressure.

Trees also show us how deeply entrained community is in our surroundings. They network and communicate with each other by exploiting a vast underground system of fungi, warning other trees of dangers and opportunities. Some trees, like aspens, are really not a group of separate entities. They are one organism.

Perhaps the greatest feature of trees is that their power and grace and talent—and indeed their "technology"—can help us reduce our obsession with being the center of everything and expose the folly and selfishness of short-term thinking. They allow us to feel that—as part of a much greater whole—we are both small and large. And while our individual time on Earth is short, our actions ripple through time, and as a human community, our life is very, very long.

BRAD AND JEN BUTCHER/STOCKSY





ease

"I have a lot of faith that if people just learn how to be in the present through simple mindfulness meditation, then the practice does the work of transformation and healing."

—Jon Kabat-Zinn

TRINETTE REED/STOCKSY



Confessions of an Anxious Meditator

Meditation is usually depicted using an image of someone with a blissed-out smile. In reality, it puts us in touch with the anxiety we all carry. And that's why it can be so helpful.

By Barry Boyce

Not long after I started meditating, I was persuaded to spend a whole day at it. Let's just say it wasn't exactly easy. I soon felt trapped in my own body, and since I had decided not to leave—a clear admission of defeat—I sat there wanting to climb out of my skin. My breath shortened. I was sweating in my palms, and all over really. My eyes darted around the room. Occasionally, we got up and walked around, but that didn't make much difference. Something was going on that was about more than an inability to sit still.

During a break, I talked to the meditation instructor assigned to me, asking why I had these extreme feelings.

"That's anxiety," he said.

"What am I anxious about?" I asked, reaching for a lifeline.

"You tell me," was the reply.

"Great," I groaned.

As I considered what he said, I started to examine more closely what was happening—both when I was meditating and not.

Even though I considered myself a pretty laid-back guy, I was aware that restlessness and anxiety were actually everyday companions. It wouldn't necessarily be noticeable to anyone on the outside, but inside, man, those wheels were turning. There was a constant sense of anticipation, a subtle worry. I began to see that what presented itself to me as a gnarly ball of thoughts during meditation (on the order of "get me out of here," "I can't take it anymore!") was simply revealing the agitation that was always there, whether in

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANDRÉ DA LOBA



the background or very much in the foreground.

In the days following this first meditation marathon, I peered even more deeply into this experience. My restlessness, it seems, was borne of the fact that I saw lots of time stretching out before me—my entire life, in fact—and I didn't know how to fill it. Nor did I know what calamities, disappointments, and heartbreaks it might be filled with. You don't have to get too far along in life for the frailty of human life to be made crystal clear—people die, friendships and loves end, some great hope you had is dashed. By the time I was 25, I had already experienced my father's sudden death, the "love of my life" had left me (several times), and the career I'd constructed in my imagination didn't pan out. No wonder the future felt like a sketchy proposition.

Danger Lurking Everywhere

Apparently, the root of the word "anxiety" has to do with constriction and squeezing. They got that right. Anxiety can feel like being gripped or pushed or held down. In my mind's eye, I see the "giant" Gulliver from the Jonathan Swift novel being tied down by the Lilliputians with hundreds of little ropes. Each of our worries is another Lilliputian manning a rope and a stake. We tug against it, but it pulls tighter.

Just think of all the many ropes these Lilliputians can get you with: Someone close to you just lost her job. She's in a lot of pain, scared about the future. So are you. The phone rings, at night. Is it bad news about your mother? Has she been rushed to the hospital?

Just turning on the news can make you anxious. Social unrest, war, environmental degradation; what kind of future lies ahead? And what about the world we're leaving for our grandchildren? Maybe we shouldn't have brought kids into this nightmare to begin with...and down the rabbit hole we go.

If you're like most of us, you can also get crazy anxious about your things. Your bike, clothes, car, house—they're falling apart, need an upgrade, might get stolen or robbed. Or you get "pocket anxiety," as a friend of mine calls it: you suddenly start reaching frantically into every pocket and patting yourself down to find

your keys, your ID, your boarding pass, your train ticket, your phone. Having our things in place and accounted for makes us feel secure. We're Boy Scouts, dutifully triple-checking that we have our trusty set of tools before venturing out into the dark and dangerous woods.

One of the worst things about anxiety is that its cause can sometimes be evasive and hidden. You wake up in the middle of the night with "free-floating" anxiety. Suddenly here you are, agitated for no reason you can identify, and unable to get back to sleep. Your thoughts turn to what a wreck you will be in the morning. Things go from bad to worse. You try counting sheep. They're all black.

When faced with all the anxieties that emerge from deep in the mind—whether in broad daylight or in the dark of night—perhaps the best strategy would be to ignore them. When we do that, though, they don't go away. Rather, it just becomes emotional Whack-A-Mole. The thoughts pop up and we push them down, and eventually they pop up again. Thwack!

That brings us back to meditation, and what it might have to do with anxiety. The aim of meditation is often described as being in the present moment, but we can so easily hear that to mean the present moment is like a vacation destination we can escape to, where we get away from those pesky alternatives: the past and the future. Before you know it, meditation has become a fight to the death, a struggle to set up shop in the present moment and never to stray from there.

As I experienced during that first day of practice, this effort feels anything but peaceful. In fact, it's common for meditators—new or experienced—to come away from a session thinking, *This didn't make me more peaceful. It made me even more anxious!*

Meditation itself does not make you anxious. Rather, meditation puts you in touch with what is making you anxious. It puts you in touch with life. And so, as you sit, with no apparent and immediate threats to your safety, the normal barrage of thoughts beginning to slow a bit, your deepest worries float to the surface: will your daughter find a job that pays enough, how mom's failing health seems destined for a bad outcome, whether you took the pen out of your pants pocket before you started the washer.

It turns out the present moment is not automatically a place of rest. It's tilted slightly forward, perched on the edge of the future. What's about to happen lies just ahead. The next word, the next step, the next thought. We're always moving forward into the next moment.

We are also cautious and self-protective beasts—and we're vulnerable to being hurt, physically and mentally—so we like to feel that the next moment will be safe. It's human to fear for our safety and security, and the safety and security of those we love, and indeed

the safety and security of the planet.

But sometimes it isn't safe, and one thing is certain, what will occur in the next moment is never certain, and that causes...anxiety.

Unavoidable and Even Necessary

Our bodies are storehouses of incredible energy, and our brains decide how that energy will be allocated and directed. Using the faculties cognitive scientists call concentration and selective attention, we can focus our energy like a laser beam on the task at hand—driving a car, writing a report, painting a landscape. We marshal the most resources, however, when we fear for our safety or seek to arm ourselves for an uncertain future. In those moments, the brain sends signals to the body to be primed to rev up the energy needed to act. It's the famous fight or flight instinct, and it's a really nifty tool to help us stay alive. Indeed, the stuff of anxiety is our survival instinct converted into raw energy.

Police and first responders, for example, usually have big adrenalin spikes when they get a call. If they show up and it's nothing, a cat in a tree, it still can take a while for the energy to settle. They were primed to fight to the death if need be. On that day I tried to sit in meditation I wasn't walking into the kind of dangers that law enforcement faces on a daily basis, but the uncertainty I had about my future felt just as precarious.

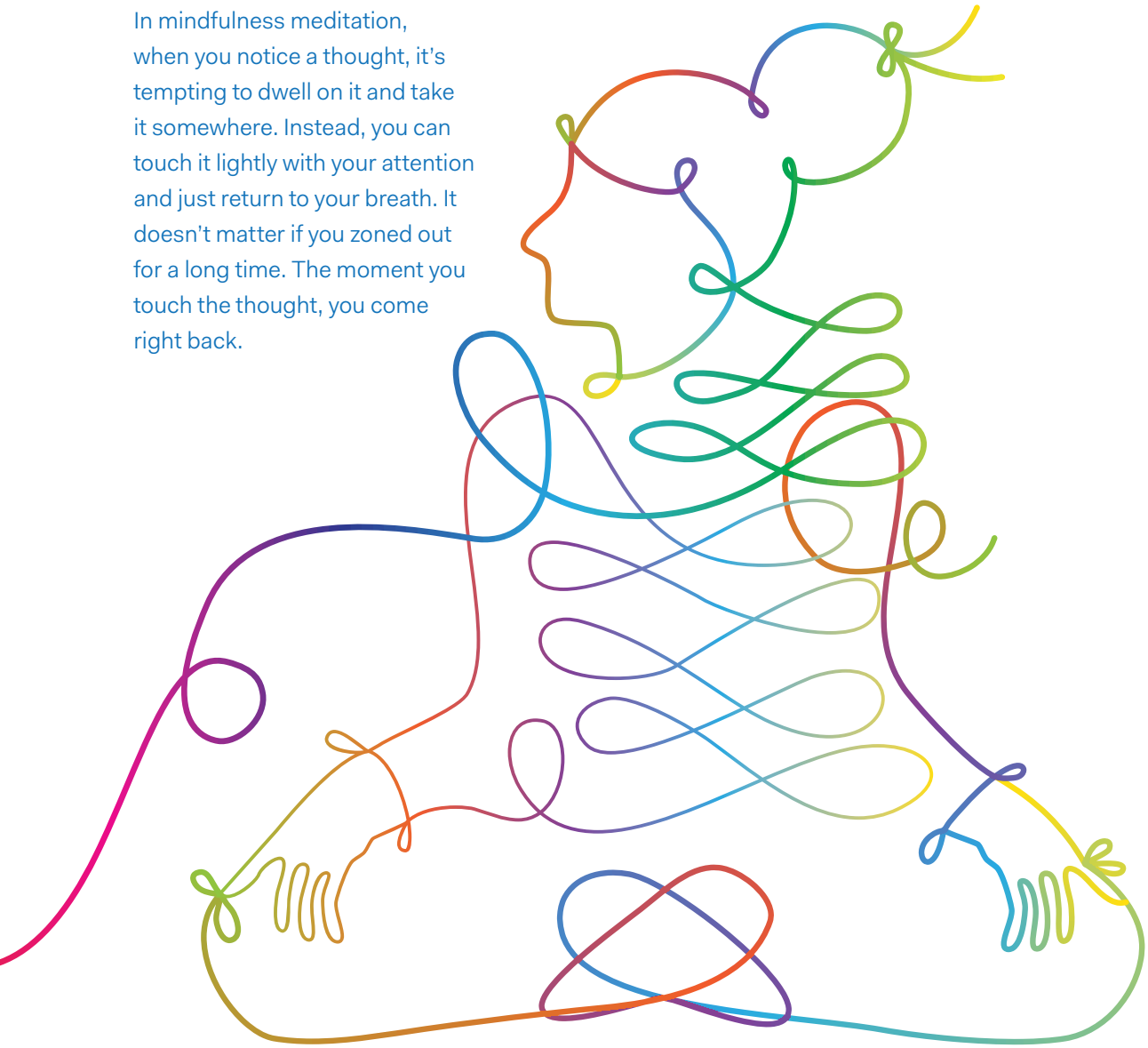
And the thing is, we get no advance training in the classroom for how to live in an uncertain world inhabiting a human mind and body. It's all on-the-job training, with little more than our survival instinct to serve as commander, our worried minds happy to take the first watch.

During meditation, I was regularly exposed to the thought process that lay beneath all the mental and physical gyrations that tied me up in knots. It became a laboratory, a unique opportunity not to think further about each thought, but to quickly see it for what it was, to move on, and then see the next thoughts as they arose. I could experience how they felt in my body, what other ideas they triggered, and how it's possible to move from a trot to a canter to a full-on gallop as one thought piles on top of another. In meditation, one becomes a self-anthropologist. Just noticing, not judging too much, just noticing.

As a side effect, I began to unclench my mental jaw, to loosen up. I started to perceive thoughts less as big solid entities or monumental truths. They became more transparent. It's like when you know that someone is making something up—you can see right through it. Instead of believing my thoughts as fact, I was able to observe them as passing events in the mind. For example, if the thought emerged that I might run out of money soon, I could see that as a thought, a response to uncertainty, note it and move on. It did not have to start a cascade of

Tip

In mindfulness meditation, when you notice a thought, it's tempting to dwell on it and take it somewhere. Instead, you can touch it lightly with your attention and just return to your breath. It doesn't matter if you zoned out for a long time. The moment you touch the thought, you come right back.



other thoughts that revved up my emotions, culminating in the image of me wandering the streets. A thought might even come back, repeatedly, but it didn't have to make me anxious.

After months had passed and I had done a lot more meditation, I went back to my instructor.

"How's it going?" he asked.

"Well, I'm still agitated and fidgety, but not as much. It almost feels good," I said.

He laughed. "That's a little bit of well-being overtaking you."

"Really," I said. "Well, how about that." I was like a kid who had found he suddenly had a week off from school unannounced. There was relief.

The very next time I meditated, I worked myself up into a lather. This time, my mind was captivated with how great a meditator I was going to become. It was the polar opposite from that other time, where I obsessed about how terrible a meditator I was. Now, my ambitions gnawed at me, making me impatient, overeager, and...anxious. It seemed I would default to anxiety at any turn.

And then a little gap opened up in my mind. Something jerked my attention back to the meditation instruction, and to the next breath. At that moment, there was a tiny little wow, an eentsy a-ha moment: No matter how many times I freak out and set off a rapid-fire chain reaction of speedy thoughts, I can simply come back here and start fresh, all over again.

Taking It Moment by Moment

We sometimes like to fantasize that life is not precarious and dodgy. We like to think it's not filled with risk and that as humans our hearts and bodies are not vulnerable. But deep down, we know life is shifty. Like when my dad died, out of nowhere. Or your lover finds someone new.

Life is like this. Up and down, repeatedly. The point of meditation is not to go off and enter a fuzzy zone of bliss. The point is that the habit of seeing our thoughts as less solid and threatening can rub off and start to become a part of how we see and work with the world in the heat of the moment, away from our meditation room, in the arena of life.

So the next time we feel we are about to leap out of our skin—when the hows and whens and what ifs start to build—we may notice a cool breeze touching our skin, and a shaft of sunlight splashing in front of us. Maybe we catch the sound of a bus passing nearby, or come back to the awareness of the people all around us.

We're a little scared; and that's OK. Our anxiety lets us know we're alive. And yet we're not fighting for survival. We have survived. We are surviving. The next moment awaits.

Barry Boyce is Mindful*'s editor-in-chief.*

CONSIDER

Fail Safe

Worried that you're "no good" at meditation? Take heart: There is no "perfect" in mindfulness.

By Mark Bertin, MD

Sitting still in quiet, well fed and sheltered, the mind is still quite capable of making an intense mess of the moment. We're typically in no danger while meditating, and yet can't be peaceful or relaxed on command. The future looms, the past haunts, or the present may seem a complete muddle. If your mind adds that much stress to your life while sitting quietly, what does it do when life is actually hurtful or unclear?

If you're a new meditator, someone has hopefully explained that nothing is going to happen right away, and that you can't force yourself to have a quiet mind. But even so, you likely imagine yourself sitting perfectly still, blissfully at peace and that you're going to do this for 30 minutes every day, without fail.

The B-Side

Or, you might be an experienced meditator, which adds a whole other layer: *I've been doing this for decades. I'm still getting annoyed at people and I'm not that happy with my life lately even though I should know better, and I didn't meditate much the last few weeks. I'm clearly not very good at this.*

In either case, you may doubt your skill, persistence, or whatever other chink you find in your mental armor. This is perfectionistic voice telling you what your mindfulness practice "should" be instead of valuing what it is. And it just may undermine your determination to continue. *If I can't do it well, I'm not doing it at all.*

A different story

What would it mean to observe your inner commentary without buying into it for a few minutes? *I'm restless, and I'm just going to be OK with being restless right now.* We set out with the intention to sit, we get distracted, and we come back to our awareness. That's just how it goes.

There is no perfect mindfulness experience any more than there is a perfect life. Within your practice and in everyday life, notice the thought or the obstacle when it crops up—*there's perfect again, something isn't as it "should" be.* And then return to the next breath, and to your best intentions, once again.

Mark Bertin is a developmental behavioral pediatrician and author of Mindful Parenting for ADHD.


GOOD TO GREAT
Theory U
PRIMAL
Poetry Speaks

Befriending Ourselves

A *Mindful* interview with Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction creator and health pioneer Jon Kabat-Zinn.

In 1979, Jon Kabat-Zinn recruited chronically ill patients not responding well to traditional treatments to participate in his newly formed eight-week stress-reduction program. Almost 40 years later, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and its offshoots have entered the mainstream of health care, scientific study, public policy, and personal well-being.

We spoke with the health pioneer about why mindfulness has attracted so much attention and why it will continue to do so.

Q: Why does MBSR work?

A: Those of us involved in this work have paid close attention to just a few essential elements. One is that mindfulness is not a special state you achieve through a trick or a technique. It is a way of being. I have a lot of faith that if people just learn how to be in the present through simple mindfulness meditation, then the practice does the work of transformation and healing. People are so creative and intrinsically intelligent that given a chance, they perceive the truth within their own experience. "When I get attached to something, I suffer," they realize, "and when I don't get attached, I don't."

There are tremendous benefits that arise from mindfulness practice, but it works precisely because we don't try to attain benefit. Instead, we befriend ourselves as we are. We learn how to drop in on ourselves, visit, and hang out in awareness.

To be in relationship to what you are going through, to hold it, and, in some sense, to befriend it—that is where the healing or transformative power of the practice of mindfulness lies. When we can actually be where we are, not trying to find another state of mind, we discover deep internal resources we can make use of.

Appreciating this kind of awareness can have virtually immediate effects on health and well-being. As crazy as it sounds, it's possible to befriend your pain or your fear—rather than feeling that you can't get anywhere until this thing that bothers you is cut out or walled off or shut down. That's a really profound realization for someone to come to.

It's very healing to realize, if only for a moment, that you can be in a wiser relationship with your interior experience than just being driven by liking it or hating it.

JOSHUA SIMPSON

We say to our patients that there's more right with them than wrong with them, no matter what their diagnosis is. We're going to pour energy into what's right with them, and see what happens. It's a great adventure and very satisfying to be able to see people light up as they experience the knowledge that it's OK to be where they are as they are.

That gives people much more latitude in what they're actually experiencing. There's nothing wrong with being caught up in difficult, stressful, agitated, or confusing moments.

Q: Mindfulness practice can uncover dark and difficult thoughts, which people can find quite shocking. Is that beneficial?

A: We often relate to our thoughts, whether they're intensely negative or not, as a reliable statement of the truth. When you're angry, everything can seem threatening or annoying or inadequate. You believe what your thoughts are telling you. Mindfulness of thoughts allows you to be aware of a thought or strong emotion as a kind of a storm in the mind or an event in awareness. Once you see it as an event or a storm, it no longer has the same power over you.

Depression, which is a major concern for patients, is to a very large degree a disease of disregulated thinking. There's a lot of evidence that mindfulness can actually help you develop a whole different relationship with the stream of negative thoughts called depressive rumination.

Q: What role can mindfulness play in healing?

A: One of the reasons our health care system is breaking down is that we need more participation from the people who are suffering. You are not a machine being taken to the shop for a repair or a tune up. It's best if you can begin participating in your own health care as early as possible. Starting in childhood by learning mindfulness practices in school would put people on the road to a much more healthy relationship to their body and their emotions. That's much healthier than the default mode where you just hope for the best and treat the body more or less as an automobile that you drive into the hospital for repairs when it breaks down.

This speaks to an entirely different way of practicing medicine that recruits the internal resources of the patient in the treatment process. That's what MBSR is designed to do. There is now more than 31 years of evidence that the program can make a remarkable difference in people's relationship to their illness and how it unfolds. If you go into radiation, chemotherapy, or surgery with greater awareness and mindfulness, that will make a huge difference. Also, when you're more accepting of what's going on in the present moment, you bring less resistance and can be a full participant, not just a recipient of treatment. Sometimes you even need less anesthetic if you're being mindful.

PRACTICE

Tame the Nagging Voice Within

Ah, the inner critic: Always with the running commentary on *every little thing* you do. Do you even know the negative rap you're giving yourself?

Over the next several weeks practice noting your inner critic as you go about your daily life. Give it a nickname, if you like: "Meanie" sounds about right.

Would you take it?

Ask yourself: *If someone were actually standing next to me and supplying the same commentary, how would I handle it?* You'd probably be (rightfully) annoyed, and respond something like, *Thanks anyway, but I'm leaving now.*

Try this instead

Without getting sucked into debate, each time you notice the inner critic, pause and consider this approach for several breaths: *Breathing in,* recognize the voice of criticism, and whatever it's implying about you or doing to your emotional state. Acknowledge that experience without needing to either banish it or rationalize with it. *This is how I feel right now: tired and insecure and angry.*

And, let it go

Breathing out, let go. Instead of wrestling with self-judgment, see it for what it is, and turn your attention somewhere more useful. Focus only on the sensation of breathing as best as you're able, without striving or forcing anything. Wish yourself well, like you would a close friend in distress. Picture freedom, relief or ease with each exhalation as an intention for now or sometime in the future.

—*Mark Bertin*



ILLUSTRATION BY MINDFUL

PAUSE

Mindful Yoga

Try this simple series of postures and movements before you sit to meditate—or any time.

By Cyndi Lee

This sequence emphasizes balance: on your hands, hands and knees, and standing on one leg, as well as when moving the spine in all directions—forward, backward, and sideways. It's great to do whenever you want to cultivate balance and presence in your body/mind: first thing in the morning or last thing before going to bed or anytime in between. It takes about five minutes, but feel free to repeat the entire sequence or any section as much as you like.

As you move through it, notice when your mind strays, and return to the sensation of the breath or any other physical sensation, such as stretching, quivering, or your muscles tiring. That's how you'll know when to push and when to back off.

It's particularly useful to do this sequence before meditation practice as it will create both strength, flexibility, and stamina that will support the physical effort required for sitting.

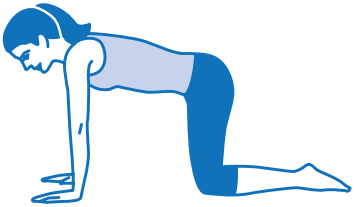
Cyndi Lee is an international yoga teacher and writer.



1

HAND WALKING MEDITATION

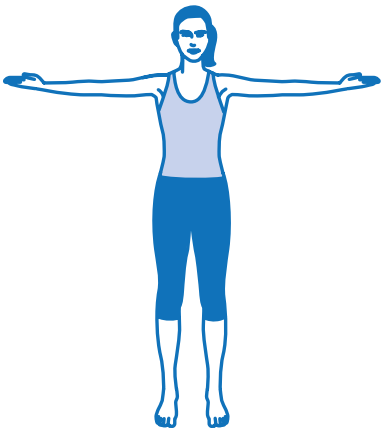
Place right hand on the floor. Then, left hand on the floor. Walk the right hand a little bit forward. Then the left hand.



2

FINDING BALANCE ON ALL FOURS

Take your time and notice how your weight shifts onto your hands as you move forward. Move around: Shift weight to the right hand and right knee, then to the left, forward and back. Slowly settle into equal weight on all fours.



6

SHOULDER ROTATIONS

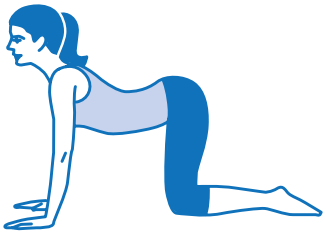
Extend your arms out to the side. Inhale and roll your arms so your palms face up. Exhale and roll arms in, palms back. Begin this action from the shoulders, letting your pinky fingers be the last part to roll up and down.



7

SIDE BENDS

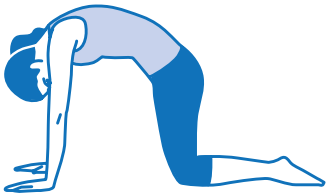
Inhale arms up. Exhale, bend to the right while the left arm reaches down. Inhale up and exhale as you bend to the left with right arm down. Pay attention to the movements from side to side, as well as the position of your head.



3

COW POSE

On an inhaling breath, lift up your seat and your chest, while you simultaneously drop your spine toward the earth and into your belly.



4

CAT POSE

Exhale, reversing this curve. Lift your waist; drop your head and tail. Repeat 3 & 4, moving with the breath, 5-10 times. Go slowly and try to feel every part of your spine as it curves one way and rounds the other way.



5

STANDING UP

Step back your right hand, then step back your left hand, and then shift onto your feet and stand up. As always, as your attention strays come back to attending to the phycial sensations.



8

CHAIR POSE

Inhale arms up and bend your knees as if to sit down into a chair—two movements at the same time! Is your mind still in your body? In the room? Gently let it come back.



9

LEG BENDS

As you exhale, stand up on your left leg, right leg bent. Return to Chair Pose and repeat on the other side. Go right and left, 5–10 times.



10

STAND QUIETLY

Remain still, keeping your eyes open. Notice what you are seeing. Ground yourself in your environment. Feel your feet on the floor. Observe your breath moving.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JASON LEE



Stress is Optional

Waging a battle against stress doesn't make much sense. It's the surest way to increase it. If you begin to feel overwhelmed, try these strategies instead, and see if being present helps you get out of your worried mind.

1. Take a walk

Modern life seems designed to make us stay in one place—sitting, standing, or lying down—for long periods of time. Most people don't even remember a time when you had to get up off your butt to walk across the room and change the channel on the TV or go over to the bookshelf to consult the dictionary. Moving has gone out of style, and the balance of mental to physical energy expended can get way out of whack. Find an excuse to use muscles that are feeling lonely and neglected. Raise your heart rate a little. Your body, and mind, will thank you.

2. Eat lunch somewhere pleasant

Taking lunch at your desk ensures your mind will stay in the same frame of reference while you're eating, particularly if you're checking email or doing work at the same time. Go somewhere else to have lunch, hang out with co-workers, let go and enjoy. Then come back to work a little refreshed.

3. Relax with a body scan

Progressive muscular relaxation can help you notice where you're holding stress. Lie down comfortably on your back with your legs straight. Close your eyes. Start by tensing muscles in your feet, then relax. Work your way up your body doing the same thing in sequence from your feet to your head. Often it's only by experiencing muscle tension and letting it go that we become aware of just how much stress our bodies are retaining.

4. Minimize multitasking

Sometimes it's necessary to be doing several things at once (or at least in rapid succession). But too much multitasking—in a constant state of partial attention—is exhausting, inefficient, and highly stressful. Instead of checking emails, planning supper, writing a report, and texting your sister, try giving full attention to one thing at a time.

5. Get your face out of your phone

Your phone is your a masterful distractor device. It's like having someone nudging and nagging you all day. It constantly steals your attention.

BONNINSTUDIO/STOCKSY



Set some boundaries on when, where, and how you will use it. Try putting it away completely during meals and social occassions. Pick a few no-phone places—doorways, elevators, in line at the store—and take those moments to follow your breath instead.

6. Look at something green

Is your view filled with brick, concrete, glass, and carpet? How about spending more time where things are growing, breathing, giving off fragrance, and glistening in the sun? Nothing like a little nature to slow you down and show you the big picture.

7. Play

All work and no play...and yes, that means you. Playing simply means doing something that has no purpose, plan, or aim. Wander the streets, play cards, go bowling, read for pleasure. The surprises that come from letting yourself go can exhilarate and refresh.

8. Go for a swim

Swimming some laps is just the right kind of boredom to help you de-stress. The rhythmic strokes and the weightlessness are like being rocked in a cradle. You can hear yourself think. Or not think, as the case may be.

9. Read something out loud

A good piece of writing or poetry read aloud can have a very soothing effect. That's why children love to be read to. If you're not a fan of your own voice, try listening to an audiobook.

10. Listen, really listen, to a piece of music

Sit or lie down and listen to an entire album, symphony, opera, or whatever suits your taste. You may feel yourself twitching or reaching for your phone at first, but soon you'll sink into the sounds.

11. Take a vacation

Only 57 percent of American workers use all of their paid vacation time, and people with higher annual incomes take the least days off. Take the time and space to really take care of yourself.

SOREN EGEBERG/STOCKSY

PRACTICE

Hand on Heart

A practice to help you respond skillfully to distressing events. You can do it quickly, many times a day if need be, to bring a calming awareness to your experience.

1

Place one of your hands gently over your heart, so that you feel the warm touch of your hand on your chest. Take a moment to acknowledge the simple action of providing a calm, comforting presence for yourself.

2

Begin to breathe more slowly, more gently, more deeply, into your heart center. Feel the warmth from your hand sink deeper into your body, and expand into a wider area.

3

Recall a moment, when you felt safe, loved, and cherished by another being. (With practice, evoking this memory can happen instantly, too.) Not the entire relationship, just one moment. This could be a moment with a spouse or a parent or a child. It could be a moment with a friend, a therapist, a teacher, or even a beloved pet.

4

As you remember this moment, let its warmth wash through your body; savor this feeling for 30 seconds. Perhaps your muscles will relax, or a sigh of contentment will arise. Just bathe in this warm, accepted feeling, even letting a smile come to the corners of your mouth.

5

When you are ready, bring your awareness back to the present moment. Reflect on any shift you felt in your body from this practice. Carry this sense of grounded calm into your day.



connect

"When you begin to notice the connections happening around you, your world can be one of curiosity and delight. And what you need can flow into your life in perfect harmony."

—Meg Spinella



VICTOR TORRES/STOCKSY



*

HEAR A way to cultivate deep listening.

*

HALT whatever you are doing and offer your full attention.

*

ENJOY a breath as you choose to receive whatever is being communicated to you—wanted or unwanted.

*

ASK yourself if you understand what's said; if not, get clarification. Instead of making assumptions, bring curiosity to the interaction.

*

REFLECT back to them what you heard. This tells them that you were really listening.

Are You Hearing Me?

Giving someone your full attention isn't easy, but it's a skill you can hone.

By Elaine Smookler

Have you ever tried to have a conversation with somebody who wasn't listening to you? Have you ever seen yourself nodding and smiling during a conversation while in your mind you were somewhere else?

Of all our communication skills, listening is the one most called upon—and neglected. Yet philosopher Martin Heidegger identified it as a key to maintaining meaningful relationships. So, what is listening? At its core, listening is really just taking time instead to experience what we're hearing in the moment.

One of my mindfulness students told me he wants to nurture a deeper connection with his wife, but has difficulty listening when she speaks because there are so many things in his head competing for attention. He wants to pay attention to her but doesn't know how. Most of us have difficulty focusing and sustaining our attention. But contrary to what we might wish to believe, evidence shows we can't really focus on multiple things at once. So when I'm planning email responses in my head while you're talking, it's virtually impossible for me to adequately absorb both my emails and what you're saying. The brain simply doesn't function in this way.

Listening takes time and effort, and it's a skill that requires honing. First, you need to set a clear intention to be a better listener. That way you create a frame of reference for checking in with yourself, so you can notice when you're getting lost in your own thoughts while someone's talking to you. Once you recognize this, take a breath, smile because you noticed, and redirect back to genuine listening. It's like returning to your breath in meditation. And just like with meditation, noticing and returning to the present is really the goal. Your mind will drift away, so keep on coming back.

Once you set an intention to listen, you can work on going deeper in conversation. Remember: Listening involves paying attention both to what another person is saying and what that person is trying to communicate beyond words. And I bet the very first time you give your attention to someone, you'll notice instant softening, openness, and connection.

Elaine Smookler is a psychotherapist and senior faculty member at the Centre for Mindfulness Studies.

SIMONE BECCHETTI/STOCKSY

PRACTICE

We Are All Connected

Tune into our shared humanity with a loving-kindness meditation.

By Sharon Salzberg



STUDIO FIRMA/STOCKSY

There are about 7.5 billion people in the world, yet as we go about our individual lives, it's easy to feel separate from others. Even when standing in line, for example, it's like we're in our bubbles.

We typically experience the world dualistically; there's "us" and "them," or "self" and "other." But no matter our belief system, actions, or status, we are—all of us—joined through strands of relationship and interconnection.

Through loving-kindness meditation, you can learn to see the lives of others as related to your own. This doesn't mean you like everybody, or agree with everything they do. It means you're able to open up to the possibility of caring for others not just because you like them, admire them, or are indebted to them, but because your lives are inextricably linked.

Use this practice to recover your innermost knowledge of that linkage, dissolve barriers you have been upholding, and genuinely awaken to how connected we all are.

1 Begin with someone who has helped you; maybe they've been directly generous or kind, or have inspired you though you've never met them. When you think of them, they make you smile.

Bring an image of the person to mind, or feel their presence as if they're right in front of you. Say their name to yourself, and silently offer these phrases to them, focusing on one phrase at a time.

May you live in safety.
May you have mental happiness (peace, joy).
May you have physical happiness (health, freedom from pain).
May you live with ease.

Don't struggle to fabricate a feeling or sentiment. If your mind wanders, simply begin again.

2 After a few minutes, move on to a friend. Start with someone who's doing well right now, then switch to someone who is experiencing difficulty, loss, pain, or unhappiness.

3 Offer loving-kindness to a neutral person, who you don't feel a strong like or dislike for: a cashier at the supermarket, the barista at the coffeeshop, the guy coming out to check your internet connection. When you offer loving-kindness to a neutral person, you are doing so simply because they exist—you're not indebted to or challenged by them.

4 Offer loving-kindness toward a person with whom you have difficulty. Start with someone mildly difficult, and slowly work toward someone who has hurt you more grievously. It's common to feel resentment and anger, and it's important not to judge yourself for that. Rather, recognize that anger burns within your heart and causes suffering, so out of the greatest respect and compassion for yourself, practice letting go and offering loving-kindness.

5 Finish by offering loving-kindness to anyone who comes to mind—people, animals, those whom you like, those whom you don't—in an adventurous expansion of your own power of kindness.

Sharon Salzberg is a meditation teacher and author of Real Love: The Art of Mindful Connection.

Are You Pushing People Away?

You say you want to make genuine connections, but your actions may speak otherwise.

By Zoe Gerlach

A few years ago, a client of mine moved, and signed up for a dance class so she could meet new people. But after several weeks she told me she wasn't having luck connecting with any of the people in the class.

Then one day her dance instructor asked her why she always showed up late for class and left right at the end. This was an "aha" moment: She realized that although she was "putting herself out there," she really wasn't making herself available for friendship, specifically by not being present for those key moments when connection might happen: before and after class.

She acknowledged that she felt anxious whenever we talked about her meeting people. When an opportunity did arise for her to make a connection, she would get stuck in her head. She also worried she wouldn't know what to say or how to act during unstructured moments. And let's face it: Meeting new people can be awkward. We want to be able to say the right thing, sound clever, seem informed. Deep inside we all know we won't "click" with everyone, but that doesn't stop us from getting trapped in our thoughts about why.

We began working to help her feel at home in her own body. Because the more you understand your emotions and reactions, the more authentic you will be with others—and authenticity is an attractive quality. Then you can practice being present with others, just as you are, with kindness and compassion toward yourself.

Here are four things you can do to cultivate awareness and trust in yourself, which will ultimately help you trust and connect with others:

Let Yourself Connect

First, notice your breath. Then notice what you're feeling. If you're anxious, grumpy, or unsettled, acknowledge it without judgment. As you accept yourself and your feelings, you naturally relax so that you're not absorbed by those feelings. Breathe deeply into your



ILLUSTRATION BY SÉBASTIEN THIBAULT

belly. Imagine meeting new people that you really like. Picture laughing with them. Recognize that connection wants to happen, even repeating to yourself, "Connection wants to happen if I let it." Feel your feet on the floor. Send a kind thought to the world and then receive that kind thought back.

Nervous? That's OK

How do you feel about trust? Sit with that question and pay attention to how your body responds. Do you notice any tightness, knots, jitters? These tiny inner sensations are there for a reason. If you feel uneasy about trusting people, be kind to yourself about that. Picture yourself out in the world with confidence, knowing that unease is part of you, too.

Cultivate Curiosity

We're naturally curious. Watch any child play and you'll see that's true. You can embody curiosity by approaching the people you meet with authentic awareness. Relax your body and roll back your shoulders. Take a risk: Ask a question. Engage your sense of wonder and you may be surprised that your anxiety has taken a backseat to your curiosity about who you're talking to.

Choose Connection

Notice the people who are making themselves available to you. That doesn't mean settling for spending time with people you don't find interesting. But don't waste energy on those who aren't available. (Most likely their distance has nothing to do with you.) Our bodies react more strongly to negative stimuli than to positive, so we're predisposed to focus on those relationships. And yet when we feel rejected, we can blind ourselves to all the love that does exist in our lives. Keep all this in mind and continue to mindfully choose love and connection over fear and rejection.

Zoe Gerlach is a relationship coach and licensed marriage and family therapist.

Make Your Love Life Your Hobby

Creating a deeper connection with your partner isn't so different from engaging with your favorite activity.

By Cheryl Fraser



My best friend Lori, whom I met when we were nine, has a strange hobby: She runs 100-mile ultra marathons in the mountains. For fun. I know, crazy, right? Because I'm the sane one, my hobby is to train my dog in agility. That's where my rescue mutt joyfully runs through tunnels and zooms over teeter-totters while I try to keep up.

Another hobby is my love life. That's where I train my sweetie, or perhaps he trains me, in all things connective. We learn new communication techniques, we make time for lovemaking, and we plan romantic adventures together.

But wait. Can your love life be a hobby? You bet it can. The best way to strengthen your connection is to treat your love life like you do your golf game or pottery class. Think about it: By definition a hobby is supposed to be fun—we look forward to our golf game or that weekly class with happy anticipation. No matter how busy life gets we make our hobby a priority—we carve out time to enjoy it. We take classes or read how-to books to improve our skill at what we love.

When you were first dating you naturally treated love like a hobby. In the throes of early infatuation everything seemed effortless. Thanks to hopping hormones your sex drive was high. Thanks to neurochemicals of love, your beloved was always in your thoughts

ILLUSTRATION BY SÉBASTIEN THIBAULT

and you planned your life around them. The friendship was wonderful.

Like great gardens, great relationships need tending. So if you want to make your relationship your new hobby, ask yourself when you last created a fun date with your mate, or planned for passion, or studied to improve your sexual repertoire or communication skills.

Bids for Closeness

Underneath that deep, seemingly effortless, early passion and intimacy was a hidden skill: the ability to make and accept bids for emotional closeness. According to marriage researcher John Gottman, successful couples are mindful of these bids for connection and pay attention to them. These bids might be a look, a question, an affectionate stroke of the cheek, anything that says, "Hey, I want to be connected to you." Most bids happen in simple, mundane ways, and if we are mindless we miss the overture.

Gottman's studies indicate that couples who eventually divorce ignore their spouse's bids for connection 50–80% of the time, while those in happy marriages catch most of these emotional cues and respond kindly.

Make Time to Connect

As anyone who maintains a long-term friendship knows, these relationships only thrive by design. The 40 years and 1,000 miles that separate us doesn't get in the way of the support, love, and laughter I share with Lori. But it takes effort. We *make* the time to connect. The same goes for love relationships. Great couples pay attention and create connection. This is what weaves the fabric of closeness, creating a blanket of security that wraps you up in love.

Cheryl Fraser is a clinical psychologist, sex therapist, writer, speaker, and meditation teacher.

✳ MINDFUL POLL

WHAT'S YOUR MAIN OBJECTIVE WHEN ARGUING WITH YOUR SIGNIFICANT OTHER?

76% to work through difficult emotions and miscommunication
14% to ease tension
7% just want to win

WHEN YOU'RE ARGUING, WHERE DO YOU FEEL IT THE MOST?

40% gut
31% chest
11% back
9% head
9% jaw

DO YOU TEND TO HOLD GRUDGES?

41% Yes
59% No

Touch the One You Love

The research is conclusive: Physical contact is good for both mind and body.

At our best, we intuitively use touch to span the distance between us. Two separate bodies and minds, me and you, become an "us" when we embrace. That which is broken—a promise, a skinned knee, even a heart—is coaxed toward fullness again in the incubator of a loved one's arms.

Since touching each other brings a multitude of emotional, physical, and social health benefits you'd think we'd be cuddling all the time. Yet our culture is touch-deprived. One study noted that dining companions in France touched each other an average of 110 times during the meal, but American diners only touched twice.

Touch can be a nonverbal "I love you" that somehow makes everything OK, or, if not OK, at least a little better. When one study asked people to anticipate a painful blast of white noise, there was heightened activity in the threat/stress response areas of the brain. However, if their romantic partner stroked their arm while they waited, they showed no reaction to the impending stressor.

When you are sad, anxious, or having a generally lousy day, don't you just want a hug? Dacher Keltner of the Greater Good Science Center calls touch "the primary language of compassion." Touch calms cardiovascular stress, triggers oxytocin (the "love hormone"), and activates the vagus nerve. In a fascinating study, Keltner separated two people from each other with a barrier. One subject put their arm through an opening while the other was instructed to convey various emotions using only a one-second touch on the unseen stranger's arm. The person being touched identified compassionate touch correctly 60 percent of the time—the odds of getting it right by simply guessing, they calculated, was 8 percent. Think about that. We can convey compassion toward another in a single second of touch.

So why do we hold back? Enjoying touch is natural but we may learn to resist loving touch after suffering unpleasant experiences. Or perhaps



JENNIFER BRISTER/STOCKSY

we simply feel awkward with affectionate display because hugs and kisses between our standoffish parents were nonexistent.

Yet nonverbal contact nurtures, reassures, and connects, so it follows that increasing mindful touch can improve relationships. Indeed, marital satisfaction research reveals that happy couples share similar touching behavior.

So touch more, and touch often. On a recent weekend trip I looked for examples of how contact makes us feel safe. Here is what I saw: My friend's blonde stepson, negotiating his new family, gently holds his guinea pig to his body, stroking the fur of his constant friend, desperate to find a center in the middle of change; a backpack-and-skateboard-laden couple on the ferry, journeying to places unknown, kiss and nibble as we cross the Strait of Georgia. Gnarled and ropey hands, now too twisted for wedding rings, entwine as an elderly couple look both ways before crossing, just as they've been doing for a half-century. Leaning my head back onto my sweetheart's chest, his arms circling me, we watch our elders and hope we will still be holding hands decades from now, buffered from whatever painful blasts this world has in store for us. *—Cheryl Fraser*

PRACTICE

Keep the Lines Open

Nurture a loving connection with a regular sharing practice.

By Tara Brach

Set aside time two mornings a week to deepen your appreciation for your partner, and see if your connection feels more spacious.

1

Begin by sitting silently together for 10–20 minutes, as time allows.

2

Next, take turns telling each other what you're grateful for, what's enlivening your heart at the present time. This serves as a good way of opening the channel of communication.

3

After individually expressing gratitude, take turns naming any particular challenges you're dealing with. These are difficulties you're facing apart from your relationship.

4

Then, deepen your inquiry by taking turns noting anything that might be restricting the sense of love and openness you feel toward your partner. First, you might ask yourself: "What is between me and feeling openhearted and intimate with you?" This is potentially the stickiest part of the practice, as well as the most rewarding. Naming difficult truths is the best way to bring more love and understanding into a relationship. For example, when I get busy and my partner takes on a larger portion of the household responsibilities and ends up feeling unappreciated, I need to be reminded to express my appreciation. When we acknowledge what could cause resentment if left unsaid, it brings us closer together. But, for this step to be productive, it's essential for both partners to practice speaking and listening from a place of vulnerability, without blaming the other person.

5

Next, expand your inquiry to see whether there's anyone in your wider circle of family, friends or society at large who's important to you as an individual or as a couple, and who also calls out for your attention. Take turns identifying them, and sense what might serve well-being in this larger domain of relationship.

6

Lastly, enjoy some moments of silent appreciation together, ideally in a long, tender hug.

Tara Brach is a psychologist, author, and meditation teacher.

PAUSE

Breathe your way to better communication

You can use the breath as a tool to help you stay present, engaged and curious in your conversations.



1 Observe your breathing for clues that help you detect information about your inner state. Gradually begin to shift your attention from simply observing your breath into investing your breathing with intentions that will help you perform at your best.

2 As you breathe in, envision being curious not only about your own experience, but the experience of the person you are speaking with and the possibilities that may arise as your conversation unfolds.

3 As you breathe out, give attention to the stability of your feet and core body and, if seated, your connection with the chair. Imagine that while the currents of the conversations may shift, you can stay grounded and stable.

4 Continue to breathe: breathing in feeling curious; breathing out feeling grounded.

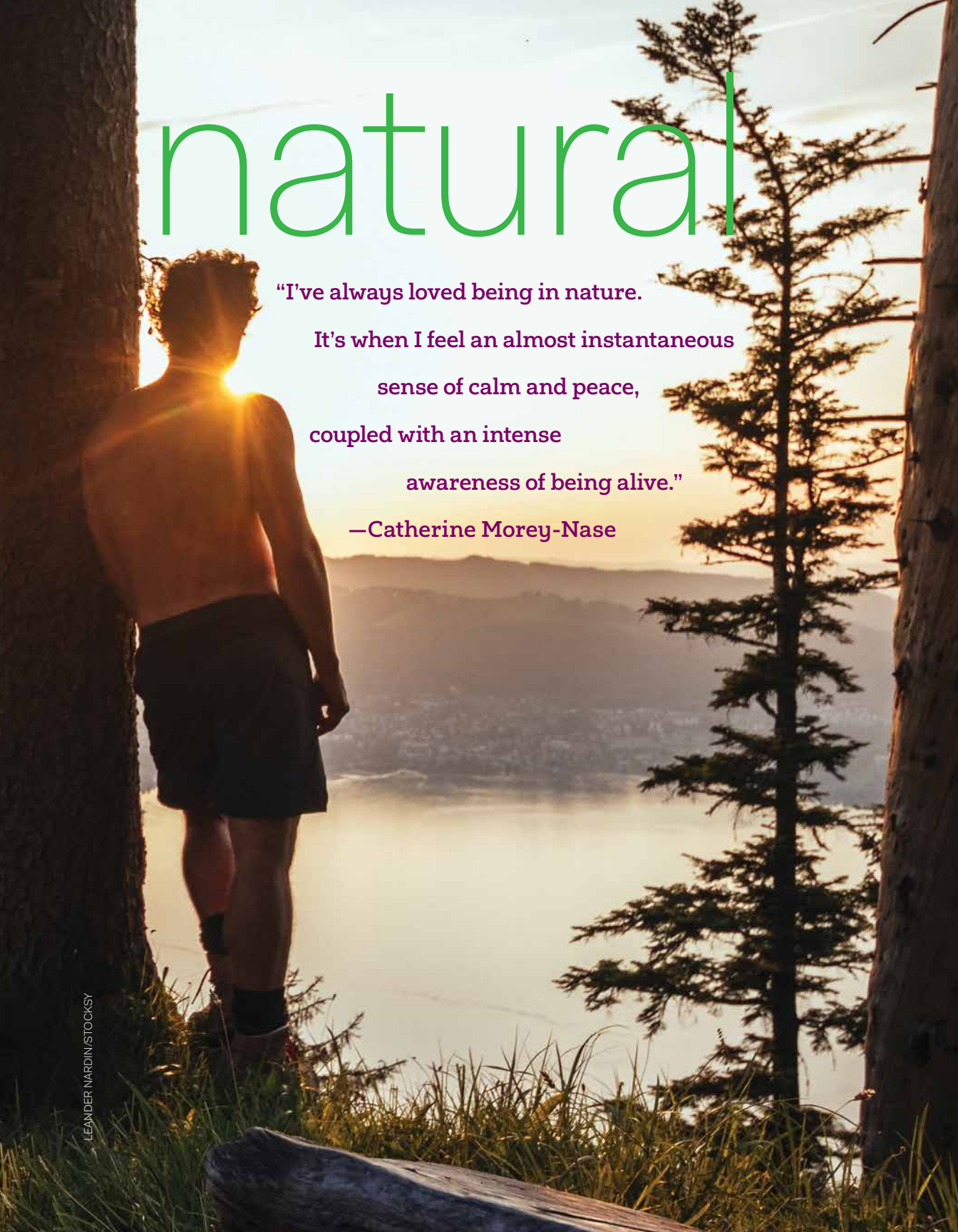
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ASIA PIETRZYK



natural

"I've always loved being in nature. It's when I feel an almost instantaneous sense of calm and peace, coupled with an intense awareness of being alive."

—Catherine Morey-Nase



LEANDER NARDIN/STOCKSY

The Healing Power of Nature

Spending time outdoors makes us happier, boosts our immune system, and increases our attention span.

You don't need a mountain view to soak in the benefits of nature. Florence Williams, author of *The Nature Fix*, says that within five minutes of being outside, your heart rate slows, muscles start to relax, and regions of your brain involved in decision-making and emotions shift from boil to simmer. Simply put: Just a few minutes of respite in a natural environment can have a huge payoff in our day-to-day lives in terms of productivity levels and well-being.

Here a few powerful ways that nature heals, according to Williams:

- Spending 60 minutes in nature helps you disengage from brooding, ruminating thoughts and cultivate a deeper social connection to those around you.
- Being in nature for five hours a month can make you happier overall, according to Finnish researchers. They suggest breaking that into a few short trips per week. "A 40- to 50-minute walk seems to be enough for physiological changes and mood changes and probably for attention," said Kalevi Korpela, a professor of psychology at the University of Tampere.
- The smell of pine trees strengthens your immune system.

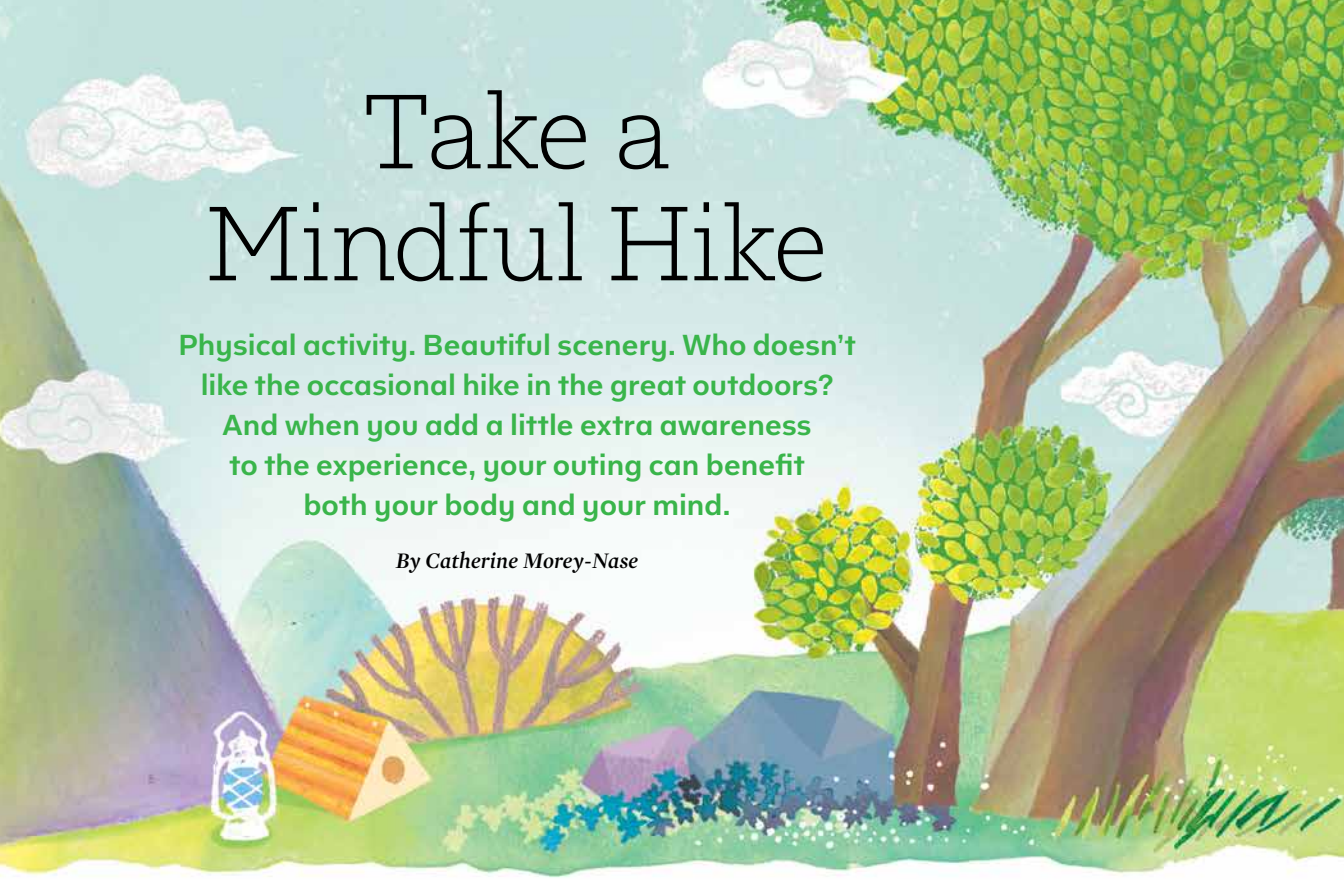
Fact

Japanese researchers studied the physiological and psychological effects of "forest bathing," or spending time among trees, and found that it significantly improves immune function, lowers stress, and reduces hostility and depression.

JOVANA RIKALO/STOCKSY



Take a Mindful Hike



Physical activity. Beautiful scenery. Who doesn't like the occasional hike in the great outdoors? And when you add a little extra awareness to the experience, your outing can benefit both your body and your mind.

By Catherine Morey-Nase

I've always loved being in nature. It's when I feel an almost instantaneous sense of calm and peace, coupled with an intense awareness of being alive. It's also where I feel happiest and most at ease. One of my most memorable childhood experiences was hiking The Overland Track, a six-day hike from Cradle Mountain to Lake St. Clair in Tasmania with my parents when I was 12. I loved being far away from civilization, carrying a large pack on my back. I was captivated by the breathtaking beauty of the ever-changing landscape—scrambling to the top of Cradle Mountain or sitting by the campfire at night under tall, majestic gum trees. It was a great adventure, one that cemented a life-long love of hiking and the outdoors.

Later, during my twenties, I spent far less time in nature than I would have liked. I didn't know many people who were interested in hiking and I was too shy to join a hiking group. Around then, I started meditating as a way of relieving stress and

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MIN AHWON



anxiety. I've since realized that, for me, meditation and being in nature are the two things that, without fail, calm my mind and relax my body.

Like meditation, being in nature has healing and restorative power. Research shows that it increases well-being, helps alleviate stress and anxiety, promotes creativity, assists with recovery from mental fatigue, helps restore attention, boosts the brain's ability to think, and engages the senses.

Today, hiking with friends is one of my favorite activities. There's easy conversation and usually a lot of laughs. But unless we make a conscious effort to stop every now and again and really pay attention to where we are and what we are doing, we can miss a lot. Excuse the cliché, but mindful hiking is really about remembering to stop and smell the roses (or the eucalyptus, as the case may be).

While a regular seated meditation practice is an important part of my life, I find simple mindfulness exercises incorporated into an activity such as hiking are an easy, enjoyable, and surprisingly effective way of being more mindful.

Next time you head out for a hike, why not make it a mindful one?



Stop Before You Start

We rarely pause between activities. As a result, we can carry the stress and tension of a previous activity, conversation, or train of thought over into what we are about to do. Before setting off on your hike, take a few moments to allow yourself to come into the present moment, letting go of any thoughts or concerns that might be on your mind.

Consciously Engage Your Senses

Approximately 90% of our attention is taken up with our thoughts. That leaves just about 10% of our attention for our bodies. Making the effort to stop throughout your hike to bring awareness to your senses will not only bring you into the present moment and deepen your connection to your surroundings, it will also bring your mind and body back into balance.

Expand Your Peripheral Vision

We naturally use our peripheral vision when scanning the night sky for a shooting star. But we use it less and less in our everyday lives due to the increasing amount of time most of us spend looking at one type of screen or another. This exercise helps reawaken your capacity to take in and enjoy a much wider field of vision:

Pick out an object 30–60 feet in front of you. As you begin to focus on it imagine that your eyeballs can't turn in their sockets—like an owl, which needs to turn its whole head to look to either side. Continue to hold your focus on this point and allow yourself to blink whenever you need to. Soften your gaze and notice what you can see at the edges of your sight.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MIN AHWON



Now stretch both arms out in front of you and wiggle your fingers. Keeping your arms straight, and continuing to wiggle your fingers, slowly move your arms away from each other while still holding your gaze on your chosen point of focus. When you lose sight of your moving fingers, slowly bring your arms back together again.

Now move one arm up and one arm down, continuing to wiggle your fingers. When you lose sight of your moving fingers, bring your arms back together again.

Allow your arms to hang down by your sides once more and take a few moments to simply notice and enjoy your re-awakened peripheral vision.

As you continue walking, every now and then, see if you can consciously tune into this expanded sense of sight.

Take Snapshots

Throughout your hike try taking "snapshots" with your mind. When you notice an object, sound, smell, flavor, or tactile sensation—the sound of birdsong, the feeling of the sun on your face, the smell of wet dirt—study it for a few moments and imprint it on your mind. As you walk on, play it over in your memory for another 30 seconds or so. It is surprising how much detail you can take in even in a brief moment. Taking snapshots in this way enables you to replay the loveliest moments of your hike later in vivid detail.

Savor Silence

Walking in silence is a wonderful way to enjoy part of your hike, even when hiking with others.

A period of silent walking offers an opportunity to consciously engage your senses in any number of ways, relaxing both mind and body as you do. And you certainly can't expect to keep thoughts of your life completely at bay, so don't try. Even intermittent moments of focus have a calming effect.

Catherine Morey-Nase, founder of The Wellbeing Corner, is a mindfulness meditation teacher in Melbourne, Australia.



PAUSE

The Space Between the Breath



Close your eyes and take three long, deep breaths. Allow yourself to make an exaggerated sighing sound on the exhalation, seeing if you can let go a little more with each exhale. Gently hold your attention on your breath and, after each exhalation, allow your next breath to come when it's ready. This short pause between breaths can be very calming. Once you have taken three deep breaths, allow your breath to resume its natural rhythm.

Take a few moments to tune into the sounds around you, and pause. Notice the sensation of air on your face, and pause. Bring your awareness down into your feet, and pause. Really feel the connection your feet are making with the earth beneath you. Allow yourself to feel grounded, connected, and supported. Allow yourself to become really aware of where you are.

You might say silently to yourself, "For the duration of this hike there is nowhere else I need to be; no one else I need to be pleasing. This is my time. Time I'm giving myself to recharge and reconnect with nature."

When you are ready, gently blink your eyes open and reorient yourself before starting your hike.

—Catherine Morey-Nase

Tune In

Next time you find yourself outdoors, take a few moments to stop and tune into your surroundings, and your body, by engaging your senses. Pay attention to the rise and fall of your chest as you breathe. Feel the sun on your face or the breeze against your skin. Tune into the sights, sounds, smells, and textures around you.

SIMONE BECCHETTI/STOCKSY

PRACTICE

Walk This Way

Try this simple set of instructions for walking meditation. Keep it handy for practicing on the go.

At some point today, you will most likely walk. You may even go for a walk.

It's one of our greatest gifts, and when we manage early in life to use our legs to get around, it's cause for celebration. Parents call their parents just to report on the event. The very fact that walking— or whatever form of ambulation you use to get around—is so central to our lives makes it a ready focus for mindful, meditative attention.

Here's a simple set of instructions for one form of walking meditation. There are many variations. This one relies on a pace that is close to how we might walk in everyday life, and in fact it can be adapted for walking in the street—just as long as you remember to pay attention to street lights, other people, and not looking like a zombie.

1 Stand up STRAIGHT with your back upright but not stiff. Feel your feet touching the ground and let your weight distribute evenly.

2 Curl the THUMB of your left hand in and wrap your fingers around it. Place it just above your belly button. Wrap your right hand around it, resting your right thumb in the crevice formed between your left thumb and index finger. (This creates some balance for you and keeps your swinging arms from being a distraction.)

3 Drop your GAZE slightly. This helps you maintain focus.

4 Step out with your left FOOT. Feel it swing, feel the heel hit the ground, now the ball, now the toes.

5 FEEL the same as the right foot comes forward.

6 Walk at a STEADY pace, slightly slower than in daily life but not funereal. When your attention wanders, bring it back to the sensations of your feet touching the ground.



A Vivid Display

Flower arranging is not only a beautiful creative endeavor; it's a mindful one.

By Claire Ciel Zimmerman and Miyako Ballesteros

You might think the beautiful floral arrangements you see in fine restaurants or hotel lobbies (or that a sweet someone sends to you on special occasions) are far beyond the scope of your craftsy yen. But with these basic guidelines from the art of ikebana, the Japanese art of meditative flower arranging, you can begin to create your own relationship with flowers. Along the way, you'll be tuning into something deep and pure within yourself: attention.

Claire Ciel Zimmerman is Deputy Editor at Mindful. *Miyako Ballesteros is an ikebana artist and instructor in Nova Scotia, who has practiced the art of flower arranging for more than 20 years.*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARVIN MOORE, STYLING BY MIYAKO BALLESTEROS

Less Is More

You don't need dramatic arrangements or fancy, costly materials to bring life and color into your home. Embellish a windowsill with a few small blooms from your backyard, placed in delicate jars. If you're using clear containers, add a few drops of food coloring to the water for a subtle flourish.

Start with Space

Where do you want your creation to live? Once you've chosen a space, examine it from all angles to get a sense of shape, lighting, color, and general atmosphere.

Gather Your Materials

Ask yourself what flowers and container will harmonize with the space you've chosen. What colors and shapes? For example, do you want something tall and skinny, or full and round?

Find the Line

To start, choose a flower with a strong line, ideally the tallest flower you plan to use, and place it. Then work down from highest point to the lowest.

Tip

As you arrange, place each flower as if it's facing the sun: up and out.

Notice and Feel

Before you place each flower, hold it in your hands; notice the curve of its stem. Twirl it around to see how it looks from different angles. Notice the variation in color, the direction the flower is pointing. Consider how it harmonizes with the space and arrangement. Then, slowly and with intention, place the flower.



Tool Time

Flower arrangements can be so much more than placing stems in vases. These tools used by professional florists can open up new possibilities.





Tip

As you're arranging, feel how your body responds to each placement. Trust your instincts, and don't be afraid to move things around or take pieces out.



A Fresh Look

Try going for a walk to look for natural materials to arrange with. Don't restrict yourself to just flowers—look for interesting branches or even pieces of bark or leaves. Get experimental.

Think Outside the Vase

Don't be afraid to be unconventional. Be curious about texture, shape, or a bold focal point.

Feel Your Way

As you work, tune into how your body responds to each placement. Trust your instincts, and don't be afraid to move things around or take pieces out.



Anti-Aging? No Thanks

Denial—even resistance—to getting older is a natural impulse. But what if we embraced our impermanence?

By Elaine Smookler

Aging has been around for as long as we have, so you'd think we might have accepted it by now. Yet the past 20 years has given birth to a booming "anti-aging" industry, replete with creams, pills, diets, and even anti-aging clinics.

So, a few bucks and a little extra work can keep me young forever? Sounds like a beautiful fantasy! Oh right, that's because it is one. As Muriel R. Gillick writes in *The Denial of Aging*, "When we believe we will stay young forever, and when we purchase special vitamins, herbs, and other youth-enhancing chemicals to promote longevity, we are engaging in massive denial."

Pushing away aging makes good sense; why not stay healthy and fit as long as possible? The difficulty in doing that is a seeming glitch in our design that reveals the essential challenge of being a biological life form. Eventually, knees and hearts blow out, eyes and sex drive weaken, the broad mind and the narrow hips exchange places. We look in the mirror, half expecting to see our 18-year-old selves looking back at us, and notice a spot here, a sag there, lines everywhere. One minute we're striving, on top of our game, the next moment we are sardined into a doctor's office with other woeful agers, waiting for a variety of invasive procedures to keep us around a little bit longer. Plus, even if we do manage to slow aging down, mortality is always waiting to slap us silly.

The human experience of aging is interwoven with vulnerability. And what if it's OK to be vulnerable? What if that's the point? What if wisdom and connection, depth and richness all spring from the shimmer of impermanence? You don't have to pretend the sensations of aging are comfortable, pleasant, or wanted. But you can be present as it all bubbles up—the whole goopy, horrifying, colorful mess called being alive.

And just maybe, if we can find a way to stay present we might be surprised to discover that being older than we were yesterday is part of being alive. Good luck staying alive any other way. Enjoy the changes of life, the new discoveries that come with every aging breath, as it all falls apart.

TRINETTE REED/STOCKSY

Rethinking the Midlife Crisis

A study from the University of Alberta challenges previous research that held that happiness peaks in the late teens and steadily decreases from midlife onward. It showed happiness increasing well into the thirties and beyond.







KRISTEN CURETTE HINES/STOCKSY

give

"When we cooperate, share, or express gratitude, reward circuits light up in the brain. We seem deeply committed to the welfare of others in the core of our being."

—Dacher Keltner

The Kindness of Friends

The generosity of others heightens one woman's awareness of her own.

By Meg Spinella

My friends have extended themselves for me in a stunning variety of forms. Two friends took turns shoveling snow for me after a one-two punch of storms. One of them also brought me kindling, to keep cozy in bitter weather. Others checked on me with phone calls and visits. Without them, I may not have surfaced until the vernal equinox.

Another friend accompanied me when I had to put my elderly dog down, even making sure I got ice cream afterward. Many expressed solidarity and condolences in writing, having had that poignant and painful experience with a pet. One friend let me cry on the phone to her until I was spent. When a second dog died soon after, a friend sat with me when my grief was most acute, waiting until I could again contain and function. And, there was the friend who lovingly cared for that dying dog in her last days, when I could not be there.

Another friend fixed a faucet, dismissing the speed and skill I so appreciated as "nothing." A longtime friend knit an outfit for my grandbaby, skills she may take for granted but assuredly I do not.

All of these diverse expressions of friendship leave me feeling cared for and blessed beyond measure. Along with the heightened awareness of this generosity comes the question, "Have I given back in kind?" Not that I want it to be a contest, a competition with the scales always in balance. I only wish to be mindful and to notice the particular moments when whatever I have to give may be needed. If I miss the chance, another will surely come along soon.

I also ask myself if I'm approachable. Would a friend readily ask me for help with the expectation that I would? I know for certain that there was a time when I was not approachable. I was too self sufficient in a way that others found intimidating. I'm happy to report that those days of isolation are over.

People didn't change to become more helpful. I opened up, became more accessible and better able to communicate my needs, and to notice and meet the needs of others. This has been the journey of a lifetime and my evolution as the friend and the befriended continues in interesting and exciting ways.

Meg Spinella is a hospice chaplain and the founder of NoahsArkNow.com.

LYUBA BURAKOVA/STOCKSY



PRACTICE

Make it a Habit

5 everyday cues to trigger generosity and kindness.

Stop Sign

Every time you come to a stop sign or a red light, take a full breath, notice how you are feeling and then wish yourself or another well. *May I be happy and safe. May I live with ease.* Continue saying the words or phrases internally until you are ready to move on or the light changes. When you come to the next stop sign or red light, repeat the practice. With repetition, this simple routine will strengthen your ability to summon kindness.

Helpful Clerk

When buying groceries or ordering your latte, actively engage with the people helping you. Internally, extend wishes of goodwill to them. Listen when they talk. Make eye contact and smile. Even these small gestures make people feel more open and kind in return. By engaging with them, you trigger a wave of reciprocity that can ripple out in all directions.

Fellow Travelers

As you board your bus, train, or airplane, let the act of taking your seat be a cue to practice compassion toward others. Bring all those traveling with you into your awareness and reflect on how they, like you, have their share of joys and sorrows and want to be happy, peaceful, and free from suffering. Internally wish for their happiness. *May you be happy. May you be safe. May you be free from harm. May you live with ease.*

Listen for the Ping

If you have email and calendar alerts enabled on your phone, use them as reminders to be mindful. Every time you hear the alert or see the reminder, pause, take a breath or two, and send yourself thoughts of kindness.

Someone in Need

Establish the intention to respond with kindness and generosity whenever you meet someone on the street who asks for support. Pause to make contact and ask how they're doing. Give some money if you like, or, if you believe it is more helpful to give funds to a group that supports the homeless, commit to writing a check at the end of the week or month.

PAUSE

Kind to You, Kind to Me

Liberate yourself by wishing good things for others.

Your ability to love or to wish someone well—including yourself and the inner critic judging your every move—disentangles you from fear, resentment, and guilt. It's truly liberating.

It also allows us to be more present in our lives. When we're less consumed with the storyline we've created that often serves to keep us separate and rigid, our hearts soften a bit and we're able to see things with a more expanded view.

Experience this for yourself with a simple exercise. When you encounter a difficult feeling, emotion, or situation, pause and take a couple of deep breaths. Then place the palm of your hand over your heart and pay attention to the feeling of warmth from the gentle contact with your body. Say a few words to wish yourself well: "I care about this suffering" or "May I be happy, peaceful, and live with ease." Take your time, wishing yourself well, as you would a loved one facing a difficult time. Can you feel the tension easing from your body?

You experience a similar feeling when you extend good wishes to another. Whether it's feeling compassion for another's suffering or celebrating her joy, your heart opens with the recognition that each of us longs for the same



things: to be happy, to be safe, and to escape unnecessary pain and suffering.

Try the exercise above by sending wishes of kindness to someone. Hold them in your awareness, and genuinely wish them well. Do you notice any softening or warmth? After a while, turn your wishes to yourself. How does that feel?

This simple exercise strengthens the muscle of kindness that we all possess. With a little time, you should be able to experience directly the softening and expansion in your own heart as you extend wishes of well-being to others in an ever-widening circle.

SIMONE BECCHETTI/STOCKSY



In Search of What Makes Us Human

A *Mindful* interview with Dacher Keltner, cofounder of the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley and author of the groundbreaking book, *Born to Be Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life.*

At what point did the conviction that we are "born to be good" emerge for you?

In the late 1980s, in psychology classes we started with the Darwinian basic assumption: the human nervous system is designed as a competitive, purely self-interested, gratification machine. But I would ask, why do I cheer up when someone acts on someone else's behalf? As I looked into it, I came to find that Darwin had been misrepresented by the evolutionary scholars that came after him. The later Darwin was persuaded by his experiences as a father and by seeing his own children die. He came to feel that "sympathy is our strongest instinct," as he wrote in *The Descent of Man*. Finding *that* Darwin was a defining and eye-opening revelation. I became convinced that we need a science that shows we're not necessarily purely self-interested, that other people matter a lot to us, that we're not just competitive, that we cooperate enormously.

Has research born out this early intuitive revelation?

The data are overwhelming now. If you give people the choice to cooperate or compete, and ask them to make a fast intuitive decision, they'll cooperate most of the time. If you let people give resources to a stranger and all they are asked to give is a penny, instead they'll give 40 percent of their resource. When we cooperate, share, or express gratitude, reward circuits light up in the brain. We seem deeply committed to the welfare of others in the core of our being. The competitive-gratification-machine model is highly questionable to say the least.

How does emotion fit into the equation?

In my field, we think of an emotion as a brief transient process that helps us achieve a social goal, like fairness, taking care of people in need, or avoiding danger. Those brief processes have an expressive element, a signal in the face or the voice or the body. They have other physiological components: chills, goose bumps, heart racing. Emotions aren't irrational. They embody judgments about the world that help us live our social lives. When you feel compassion, one of the emotions I've been most devoted to studying, your mind is captured by the idea that there is harm and you need to attend to it. Yes, emotions are challenging and they need to be navigated with care, but our rich diet of emotions allows us to engage with others and to enjoy our world. It's when we wall ourselves off from emotional connection in a cocoon of pure self-interest that we're in danger of weakening the pro-social tendencies that hold the human world together.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JIGAR MEHTA FOR THE GREATER GOOD SCIENCE CENTER



Stingy Brain, Generous Brain

What makes the difference between giving and holding back? It turns out generosity is a skill we can develop, and hard times play a big role.

By Sharon Begley

When researchers at the University of Colorado Boulder set out to "show how compassion meditation changes how we think and feel about suffering people" their study design was exacting. They showed 200 participants fictional biographies and photos of people in need. The volunteers rated: their feelings of warmth toward each suffering individual; how much distress they felt at the person's situation; how much blame they felt the individual deserved for his plight; and how much the person would benefit from a donation.

The volunteers could then donate up to $1 to each of the sufferers. Contrary to the belief that distress makes people less generous by causing them to turn away from suffering to relieve their own discomfort, the researchers found that greater distress predicted greater generosity. But so did these factors: thinking the person was blameless; believing a donation would actually help; and feeling warmth toward the sufferer. Curiously, having values, interests, and demographic features in common didn't make people more generous, the researchers found.

For the compassion meditation part of the generosity study, 58 new participants listened to biographies of suffering people—an orphaned child, a cancer victim, a homeless veteran—and were asked how much of the $100 the researchers gave them they'd like to donate to the person whose story they just heard. Then the group was split in three: some listened again to one biography; others engaged in a guided compassion-meditation session every day for four weeks; the rest were given a placebo, a nasal spray they were told contained an empathy-increasing hormone (a.k.a. H2O).

The participants were asked again if they would like to donate up to $100 to the individual they most recently learned about. The meditators reported significantly more compassion (positive feelings toward those in need) than the "compassion placebo" group did, suggesting that this effect is a real, direct consequence of meditating. But the effect on generosity wasn't straightforward. The meditating group did not make more generous donations after four weeks of daily compassion

ILLUSTRATION BY SÉBASTIEN THIBAULT

meditation than before—despite the increase in generosity-associated feelings. Reserchers aren't sure how to explain why feelings didn't translate into behavior, but they find one ray of hope in the data: The meditators' giving did not drop off as sharply as the other groups' did (also known as "donor fatigue").

It's surprising that fundamental questions about generosity—what thoughts and feelings trigger it?—are still unanswered. In a world of vast unmet needs, where figuring out how to bring out the best in people could go far to alleviate suffering, that's a troubling knowledge gap. But researchers are making headway. They are learning, for instance, that generosity does not seem to be an instinctive, default behavior. Perhaps, instead, it's an emotional or cognitive skill that must be learned.

MINDFUL POLL

COMPARED TO OTHERS, HOW GENEROUS ARE YOU?

52% average
45% more generous than others
4% less generous

THE MAIN WAY PEOPLE SAY THEY CAN BE MORE GENEROUS?

With their TIME

WHAT KIND OF ORGANIZATION ARE YOU MOST LIKELY TO DONATE TO?

16% choose international
84% choose local

But we do know that generosity wanes if people perceive the world as full of threats and looming scarcity rather than of abundance and security—one of the individual traits most predictive of individual generosity. Because generous people view the world as safe, secure, and abundant, their happiness might derive not from being generous but from a generally sunny outlook.

Perhaps the strongest message from the science of generosity is that the more adversity someone has experienced, the more compassion she feels and the more generous she's likely to be. I'm reminded of this every time I see someone who looks destitute drop a few coins into a panhandler's cup while expensively dressed commuters rush past. That fits with Colorado researchers' conclusion that belief in the sufferer's blamelessness and expecting a donation to make a difference predict generosity. Someone who knows what it is to suffer also knows how outside forces can land one in deep poverty through little fault of one's own, and how wonderful it can be to have a dollar for a McDonald's coffee.

Sharon Begley is senior science writer at STAT.

When Spending is Good For Your Heart

We know that giving to others feels nice. Turns out, it's better for our health, too.

Recent research offers the first evidence that financial generosity may literally do your heart good. A study conducted at the University of British Columbia asked 186 older adults in the United States—most of them receiving treatment to control high blood pressure—how much money they contributed each month to friends and family, or to religious, political, and charitable organizations. The more the participants gave to others, the lower their blood pressure was two years later.

But such a correlation doesn't establish a cause-and-effect connection, so to explore this further, the researchers did another experiment with 72 elderly adults in Vancouver, who were also being treated for high blood pressure. The investigators gave each of the seniors some money and asked them to splurge either on themselves or on other people. Afterward, the charitable givers exhibited lower blood pressure than the self-spenders—and the difference was on par with blood pressure reductions from exercise or starting new anti-hypertension drugs.



Exactly how "pro-social" spending protects cardiovascular health is unknown, but it may help by reducing stress or social isolation.

MELANIE DEFAZIO/STOCKSY

We All Have Something to Give

Even though many evolutionary psychologists say that altruism and sharing are part of our makeup, giving to others is not a cinch. It helps to reconsider what constitutes a "gift."



To be truly generous requires us to step beyond the self-protected bubble we create for ourselves. Going beyond that bubble takes us into a zone where others' needs may supersede our own. And that puts some pressure on the whole I'm-in-charge system we're hardwiring into place most of the time during our day. And even when we do give, if we're not careful, we give in a way that serves our own needs.

Ever receive a gift that said much more about what someone else thought you should have than what you needed or wanted? Or feel you were part of someone's do-gooder project?

When it comes to giving, we tend to think in terms of material things. Things are great to give, for sure. They can bring delight or surprise. They can provide someone with something they would never splurge on for themselves or something they genuinely need that is beyond their means. We all have a special object or two we cherish because of its special value but also because someone gave it to us in a time that counted.

Yet there is another class of giving that is harder for us but can have greater impact. This kind of giving involves giving part of ourselves to contribute to what someone needs in life. If someone is in pain, we find a way to provide some relief. Maybe they need us to spend time with their child while they get some badly needed rest. It could be the gift of encouragement, helping someone find the natural confidence within during a time of self-flagellation. Maybe we just take the time to listen.

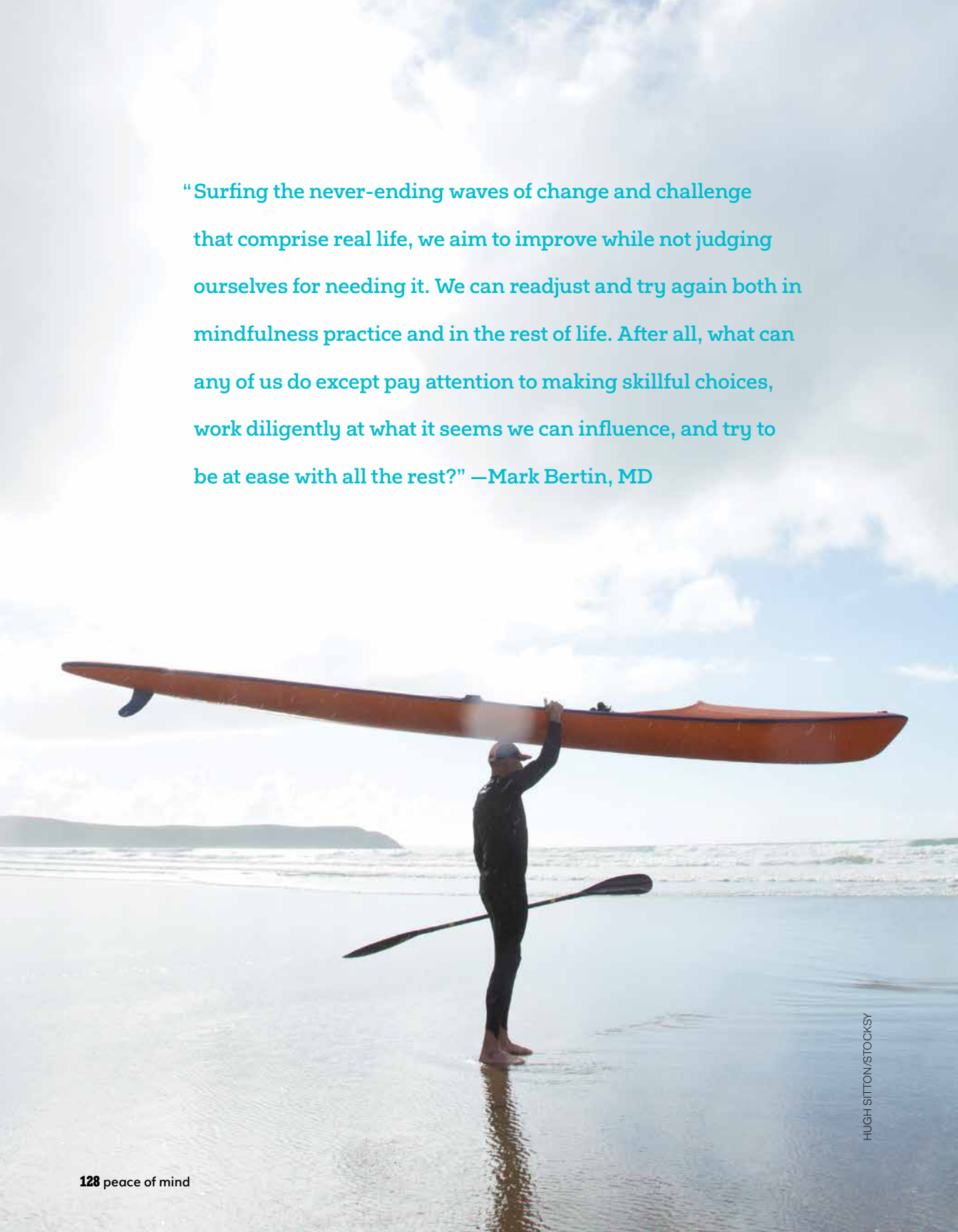
Indeed perhaps the greatest gift we can give is genuine mindfulness. When real attentiveness emerges in our life, beyond mere self-help, it's naturally contagious, and generous.

LEND A HAND

Performing acts of kindness for others or for humanity is more satisfying than pampering yourself. That's the word from psychologists who ran a six-week study with 347 adults. Helping others led to higher happiness levels among participants—but indulging in oneself did not.

JACQUI MILLER/STOCKSY

"Surfing the never-ending waves of change and challenge that comprise real life, we aim to improve while not judging ourselves for needing it. We can readjust and try again both in mindfulness practice and in the rest of life. After all, what can any of us do except pay attention to making skillful choices, work diligently at what it seems we can influence, and try to be at ease with all the rest?" —Mark Bertin, MD



HUGH SITTON/STOCKSY

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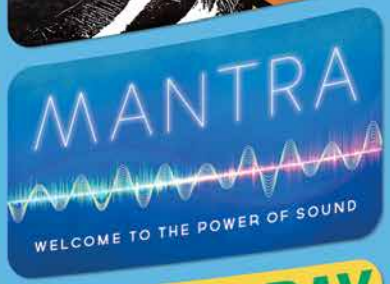


















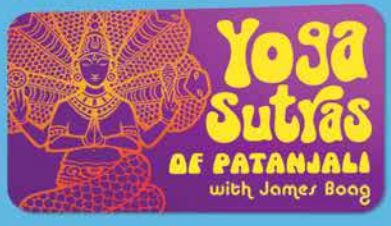


























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