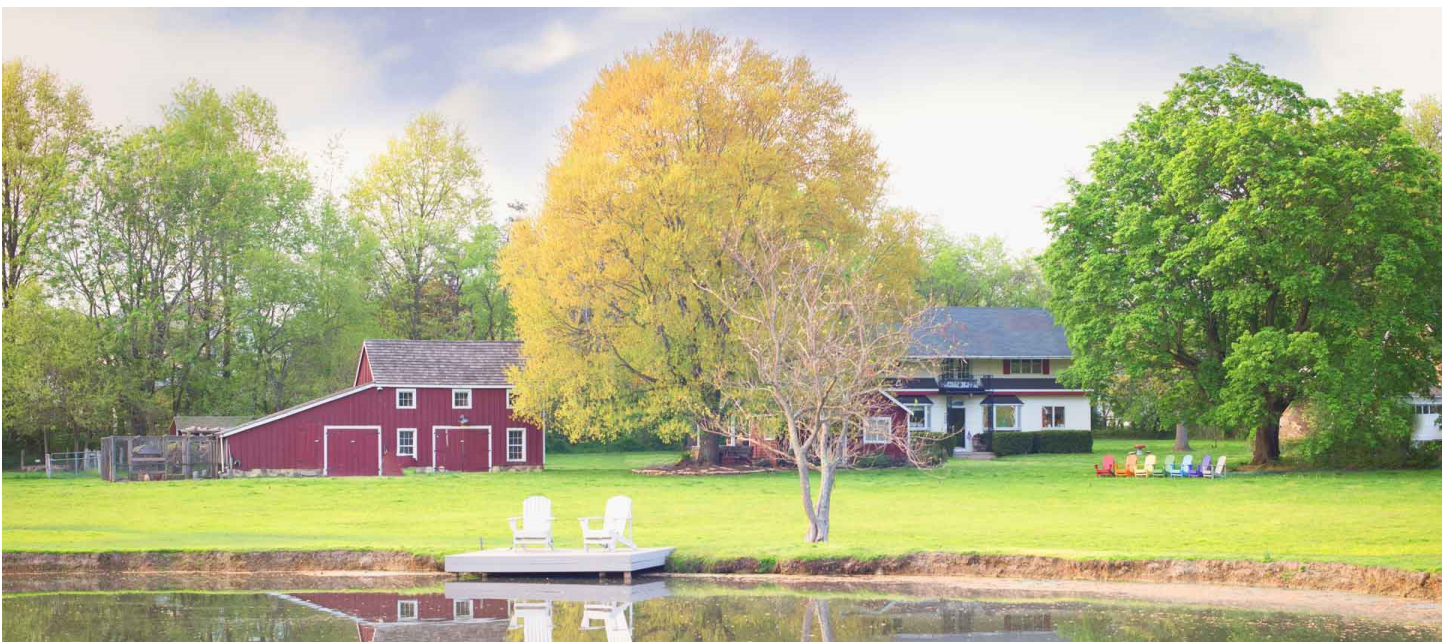


Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

(MBSR)

Home Practice Manual



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Mindfulness is about being fully awake in our lives. It is about perceiving the exquisite vividness of each moment. We feel more alive. We also gain immediate access to our own powerful inner resources for insight transformation and healing.

Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally. JKZ

Class Meetings

Oct	Class
11	1
18	2
25	3
Nov	
1	4
8	5
14	All Day
15	6
22	7
29	No Class
Dec	
6	8

Classes are 4PM to 6:30PM
The All Day Session is 11AM to 6:30PM

Course Overview

From our point of view, there is more right with you than wrong with you, no matter what your problems are. Problems can be worked with and this course is an opportunity to do that in a supportive environment. All that is required is your willingness to show up with an open mind, to explore, and be present. Meditative awareness is fundamental in this work since the present moment is the only time anyone has to perceive, learn, grow or change.

The central aim of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program is to systematically develop the skill of being present with internal experience: body sensation, thoughts, and mood, and with external experience: interactions with others, actions in the world, and the interplay between these two.

Course Structure

8 weekly sessions, 2.5 hours in duration each

1 full day retreat

Course Content

Formal mindfulness meditation methods:

Body Scan meditation, Mindful movement, Walking meditation, Sitting meditation

Communication Strategies

Stress Response in the body

Evidence and research on the impact of a mindfulness practice

Teaching Methodologies

Class dialogue and inquiry

Experiential learning

Teacher led talks and lessons

Expectation of Participants

Attendance for all classes and the retreat is mandatory and a commitment to this program on your behalf. Please call or email you are unable to attend a class.

A commitment to formal and informal meditation practice every day.

Please arrive for class on time. Be set up and ready for practice.

While not mandatory, group participation helps us all learn from the insights and experiences each member has to offer.

Attitudinal Foundations for Mindfulness Practice

Non-Judging

Practice suspending judgment and criticism and be aware of whatever comes up. When we judge, it is difficult to find peace within ourselves. It is wishing for life to be different that is the essence of suffering. Let your mind simply be a witness.

Patience

The process cannot be hurried. It is very important to be completely open to every moment. Much of the time our thoughts overwhelm our perception of the present.

Beginners Mind

Allow yourself to see the richness and newness of each moment. Often we get stuck in the rut of what we think we know about something and we miss the richness of the present now. This frees us from expectations and disappointments. It can prevent us from getting stuck in the rut of our own experience. Practice seeing with fresh eyes.

Trust

When we practice mindfulness, we practice taking responsibility for ourselves by learning to listen and trust ourselves. It is important to trust and honor your feelings, not discount them.

Non-Striving

The practice of mindfulness is about being, not doing! Almost everything we do for a reason – generally we get something or to go somewhere. But too often our striving to reach some goal undermines where we are now. By cultivating mindfulness, we learn to pay attention to what is happening now. If you sit down to meditate and you think, “I am going to get relaxed”, you have introduced an idea into your mind of where you should be. This introduces striving.

Acceptance

It is vital to be receptive and open to whatever we are experiencing in the present. Be accepting of whatever you are feeling, thinking, or seeing. Before we can change, we have to accept ourselves as we are now. Accept whatever it is that you are thinking and feeling, even when it is judgmental, angry, or impatient – bring wise attention to the experience.

Letting Go

Through letting go, we learn to let an experience be what it is. We don't try and prolong positive thoughts and feelings and reject others. We learn through the process of letting go or non-attachment to fully experience the present without wanting it to be different.

Commitment

Your practice will strengthen and grow over time with a commitment to practice. Each moment will be different. Over time, we will begin to recognize the impermanence of our thoughts and emotions as we continue with our practice making it our own. Even not practicing is in a way practicing, as we come to see how we feel when we don't. With your commitment to practice building momentum, it has the potential to become as much a part of your day and life as brushing your teeth.

Class 1

The core invitation of mindfulness is for you to befriend yourself. That means recognizing and inhabiting your own intrinsic wholeness and beauty in the only moment any of us ever has—namely this one.

JKZ



The moment one gives close attention to anything, even a blade of grass, it becomes a mysterious, awesome, indescribably magnificent world itself.

Henry Miller

Only that day dawns to which we are awake.

Henry David Thoreau

What is needed is to learn afresh, to observe, and to discover for ourselves, the meaning of wholeness.

David Bohm

Tips for the Body Scan

Regardless of what happens (e.g., if you fall asleep, lose concentration, keep thinking of other things or focusing on the wrong bit of body, or not feeling anything), just do it! These are your experiences in the moment. Simply be aware of them.

If your mind is wandering a lot, simply note the thoughts (as passing events) and bring the mind gently back to the body scan. You may include mind wandering as part of the body scan.

Let go of ideas of success, failure, doing it well, or trying to purify the body. This is not a competition. It is not a skill for which you need to strive. The only discipline involved is regular and frequent practice. You are encouraged to bring an attitude of openness and curiosity to this practice.

Let go of any expectations about what the body scan will do for you: Imagine it as a seed you have planted. The more you poke around and interfere, the less it will be able to develop. So with the body scan, just give it the right conditions: peace and quiet, and regular and frequent practice. That is all. The more you try to influence what it will do for you, the less it will do.

Try approaching your experience in each moment with the attitude: OK, that's just the way things are right now. If you try to fight off unpleasant thoughts, feelings, or body sensations, the upsetting feelings will only distract you from doing anything else. Be aware, non-striving, in the moment, and accept things as they are.

Upstream/Downstream. A Contemporary Fable

It was many years ago that villagers in Downstream recall spotting the first body in the river. Some old timers remember how spartan were the facilities and procedures for managing that short of thing. Sometimes, they say, it would take hours to pull 10 people from the river, and even then only a few would survive.

Though the number of victims in the river has increased greatly in recent years, the good folks of Downstream have responded admirably to the challenge. Their rescue system is clearly second to none: most people discovered in the swirling waters are reached within twenty minutes, many in less than ten. Only a small number drown each day before help arrives—a big improvement from the way it used to be.

Talk to the people of Downstream and they'll speak with pride about the new hospital by the edge of the waters, the flotilla of rescue boats ready for service at a moment's notice, the comprehensive health plans for coordinating all the manpower involved, and the large number of highly trained and dedicated swimmers always ready to risk their lives to save victims from the raging currents. Sure it costs a lot but, say the Downstreamers, what else can decent people do except to provide whatever is necessary when human lives are at stake.

Oh, a few people in Downstream have raised the question now and again, but most folks show little interest in what's happening Upstream. It seems there's so much to do to help those in the river that nobody's got time to check how all those bodies are getting there in the first place. That's the way things are, sometimes.

Donald Ardell



Mindful Eating: A Taste of Mindfulness



Try this exercise with any meal, a part of a meal, or even one mouthful. You'll find there are many occasions for practicing mindful eating. The idea is to eat with awareness, focusing moment by moment on seeing the food, taking it in, chewing, tasting, and swallowing. It is easier to practice mindful eating if you eat in silence than if you converse with other people. However, even in a group, you can eat mindfully if you concentrate on doing so.

- First, look at what you are about to eat. What is it? How does it look? Where does it come from? How do you feel about putting this food into your body right now? How does your body feel anticipating eating in this moment?
- Tune in to your breathing as you look at the food, knowing you are about to take it into your mouth and body.
- Feel the food in your mouth. Chew slowly and focus your energy on the food's taste and texture. You might try chewing longer than you normally do to fully experience the process of chewing and tasting.
- Note any impulse you have to rush through this mouthful so that you can go on to the next. Let such impulses remind you that you already have food in your mouth, so you needn't go on to the next bite to have a complete experience of eating. Stay in the present moment with this mouthful rather than rushing on to the next one.

- Before swallowing, be aware of the intention to swallow. Then feel the actual process of swallowing so that you become more conscious of this action as well.

- Approach each mouthful in the same way. Bring awareness to how much you are eating, how fast, how your body feels during and after the meal, and whether you are eating in reaction to various events in your life and to the feelings, especially anxiety or depression, that result from them.

You can replace eating with other sensory experiences, for example, enjoying a sunset, smelling a candle, listening to music, etc.



The Foundations of Mindfulness Practice: Attitudes and Commitment

[From Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of your Body and Mind to Face Stress and Illness. by Jon Kabat-Zinn]

To cultivate the healing power of mindfulness requires much more than mechanically following a recipe or a set of instructions. No real process of learning is like that. It is only when the mind is open and receptive that learning and seeing and change can occur. In practicing mindfulness you will have to bring your whole being to the process. You can't just assume a meditative posture and think something will happen or play a tape and think that the tape is going to "do something" for you.

The attitude with which you undertake the practice of paying attention and being in the present is crucial. It is the soil in which you will be cultivating your ability to calm your mind and to relax your body, to concentrate and to see more clearly. If the attitudinal soil is depleted, that is, if your energy and commitment to practice are low, it will be hard to develop calmness and relaxation with any consistency. If the soil is really polluted, that is, if you are trying to force yourself to feel relaxed and demand of yourself that "something happen" nothing will grow at all and you will quickly conclude that meditation doesn't work.

To cultivate meditative awareness requires an entirely new way of looking at the process of learning. Since thinking that we know what we need and where we want to get are so ingrained in our minds, we can easily get caught up in trying to control things to make them turn out "our way" the way we want them to. But this attitude is antithetical to the work of awareness and healing. Awareness requires only that we pay attention and see things as they are. It doesn't require that we change anything. And healing requires receptivity and acceptance, a tuning to connectedness and wholeness. None of this can be forced, just as you cannot force yourself to go to sleep. You have to create the right conditions for falling asleep and then you have to let go. The same is true for relaxation. It cannot be achieved through force of will. That kind of effort will only produce tension and frustration.

If you come to the meditation practice thinking to yourself "This won't work but I'll do it anyway," the chances are it will not be very helpful. The first time you feel any pain or discomfort, you will be able to say to yourself, "See, I knew my pain wouldn't go away," or "I knew I wouldn't be able to concentrate," and that will confirm your suspicion that it wasn't going to work and you will drop it.

If you come as a "true believer", certain that this is the right path for you, that meditation is "the answer," the chances are you will soon become disappointed too. As soon as you find that you are the same person you always were and that this work requires effort and consistency and not just a romantic belief in the value of meditation or relaxation, you may find yourself with considerably less enthusiasm than before.

In the stress clinic, we find that those people who come with a skeptical but open attitude do the best. Their attitude is "I don't know whether this will work or not, I have my doubts, but I am going to give it my best shot and see what happens."

So the attitude that we bring to the practice of mindfulness will to a large extent determine its long-term value to us. This is why consciously cultivating certain attitudes can be very helpful in getting the most out of the process of meditation. Your intentions set the stage for what is possible. They remind you from moment to moment of why you are practicing in the first place. Keeping particular attitudes in mind is actually part of the training: itself, a way of directing and channeling your energies so that they can be most effectively brought to bear in the work of growing and healing.

Seven attitudinal factors constitute the major pillars of mindfulness practice as we teach it in the stress clinic. They are non-judging, patience, a beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, and letting go. These attitudes are to be cultivated consciously when you practice. They are not independent of each other. Each one relies on and influences the degree to which you are able to cultivate the others. Working on anyone will rapidly lead you to the others. Since together they constitute the foundation upon which you will be able to build a strong meditation practice of your own, we are introducing them before you encounter the techniques themselves so that you can become familiar with these attitudes from the very beginning. Once you are engaged in the practice itself, this chapter will merit rereading to remind you of ways you might continue to fertilize this attitudinal soil so that your mindfulness practice will flourish.

THE ATTITUDINAL FOUNDATION OF MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

1. Non-judging

Mindfulness is cultivated by assuming the stance of an impartial witness to your own experience. To do this requires that you become aware of the constant stream of judging and reacting to inner and outer experiences that we are all normally caught up in, and learn to step back from it. When we begin practicing paying attention to the activity of our own mind, it is common to discover and to be surprised by the fact that we are constantly generating judgments about our experience. Almost everything we see is labeled and categorized by the mind. We react to everything we experience in terms of what we think its value is to us. Some things, people, and events are judged as "good" because they make us feel good for some reason. Others are equally quickly condemned as "bad" because they make us feel bad. The rest is categorized as "neutral" because we don't think it has much relevance. Neutral things, people and events are almost completely tuned out of our consciousness. We usually find them the most boring to give attention to.

This habit of categorizing and judging our experience locks us into mechanical reactions that we are not even aware of and that often have no objective basis at all. These judgments tend to dominate our minds, making it difficult for us ever to find any peace within ourselves. It's as if the mind were a yo-yo, going up and down on the string of our own judging thoughts all day long. If you doubt this description of your mind, just observe how much you are preoccupied with liking and disliking, say during a ten-minute period as you go about your business.

If we are to find a more effective way of handling the stress in our lives, the first thing we need to do is to be aware of these automatic judgments so that we can see through our own prejudices and fears and liberate ourselves from their tyranny.

When practicing mindfulness, it is important to recognize this judging quality of mind when it appears and to intentionally assume the stance of an impartial witness by reminding yourself to just observe it. When you find the mind judging, you don't have to stop it from doing that. All that is required is to be aware of it happening. No need to judge the judging and make matters even more complicated for yourself.

As an example, let's say you are practicing watching your breathing, as you did in the last chapter and as we will do a lot more in the next. At a certain point you may find your mind saying something like "This is boring," or "This isn't working," or "I can't do this." These are judgments. When they come up in your mind, it is very important to recognize them as judgmental thinking and remind yourself that the practice involves suspending judgment and just watching whatever comes up, including your own judging thoughts, without pursuing them or acting on them in any way. Then proceed with watching your breathing.

2. Patience

Patience is a form of wisdom. It demonstrates that we understand and accept the fact that sometimes things must unfold in their own time. A child may try to help a butterfly to emerge by breaking open its chrysalis. Usually the butterfly doesn't benefit from this. Any adult knows that the butterfly can only emerge in its own time, that the process cannot be hurried.

In the same way we cultivate patience toward our own minds and bodies when practicing mindfulness. We intentionally remind ourselves that there is no need to be impatient with ourselves because we find the mind judging all the time, or because we are tense or agitated or frightened, or because we have been practicing for some time and nothing positive seems to have happened. We give ourselves room to have these experiences. Why? Because we are having them anyway! When they come up, they are our reality, they are part of our life unfolding in this moment. So we treat ourselves as well as we would treat the butterfly. Why rush through some moments to get to other "better" ones? After all, each one is your life in that moment.

When you practice being with yourself in this way, you are bound to find that your mind has "a mind of its own." We have already seen in Chapter 1 that one of its favorite activities is to wander into the past and into the future and lose itself in thinking. Some of its thoughts are pleasant. Others are painful and anxiety producing. In either case thinking itself exerts a strong pull on our awareness. Much of the time our thoughts overwhelm our perception of the present moment. They cause us to lose our connection to the present.

Patience can be a particularly helpful quality to invoke when the mind is agitated. It can help us to accept this wandering tendency of the mind while reminding us that we don't have to get caught up in its travels. Practicing patience reminds us that we don't have to fill up our moments with activity and with more thinking in order for them to be rich. In fact it helps us to remember that quite the opposite is true. To be patient is simply to be completely open to each moment, accepting it in its fullness, knowing that, like the butterfly, things can only unfold in their own time.

3. Beginner's Mind

The richness of present-moment experience is the richness of life itself. Too often we let our thinking and our beliefs about what we "know" prevent us from seeing things as they really are. We tend to take the ordinary for granted and fail to grasp the extraordinariness of the ordinary. To see the richness of the present moment, we need to cultivate what has been called "beginner's mind," a mind that is willing to see everything as if for the first time.

This attitude will be particularly important when we practice the formal meditation techniques described in the following chapters. Whatever the particular technique we might be using, whether it is the body scan or the sitting meditation or the yoga, we should bring our beginner's mind with us each time we practice so that we can be free of our expectations based on our past experiences. An open, "beginner's" mind allows us to be receptive to new possibilities and prevents us from getting stuck in the rut of our own expertise, which often thinks it knows more than it does. No moment is the same as any other. Each is unique and contains unique possibilities. Beginner's mind reminds us of this simple truth.

You might try to cultivate your own beginner's mind in your daily life as an experiment. The next time you see somebody who is familiar to you, ask yourself if you are seeing this person with fresh eyes, as he or she really is, or if you are only seeing the reflection of your own thoughts about this person. Try it with your children, your spouse, your friends and co-workers, with your dog or cat if you have one. Try it with problems when they arise. Try it when you are outdoors in nature. Are you able to see the sky, the stars, the trees and the water and the stones, and really see them as they are right now with a clear and uncluttered mind? Or are you actually only seeing them through the veil of your own thoughts and opinions?

4. Trust

Developing a basic trust in yourself and your feelings is an integral part of meditation training. It is far better to trust in your intuition and your own authority, even if you make some "mistakes" along the way, than always to look outside of yourself for guidance.

If at any time something doesn't feel right to you, why not honor your feelings? Why should you discount them or write them off as invalid because some authority or some group of people think or say differently? This attitude of trusting yourself and your own basic wisdom and goodness is very important in all aspects of the meditation practice. It will be particularly useful in the yoga. When practicing yoga, you will have to honor your own feelings when your body tells you to stop or to back off in a particular stretch. If you don't listen, you might injure yourself.

Some people who get involved in meditation get so caught up in the reputation and authority of their teachers that they don't honor their own feelings and intuition. They believe that their teacher must be a much wiser and more advanced person, so they think they should imitate him and do what he says without question and venerate him as a model of perfect wisdom. This attitude is completely contrary to the spirit of meditation, which emphasizes being your own person and understanding what it means to be yourself. Anybody who is imitating somebody else, no matter who it is, is heading in the wrong direction.

It is impossible to become like somebody else. Your only hope is to become more fully yourself. That is the reason for practicing meditation in the first place. Teachers and books and tapes can only be guides, signposts. It is important to be open and receptive to what you can learn from other sources, but ultimately you still have to live your own life, every moment of it. In practicing mindfulness, you are practicing taking responsibility for being yourself and learning to listen to and trust your own being. The more you cultivate this trust in your own being, the easier you will find it will be to trust other people more and to see their basic goodness as well.

5. Non-striving

Almost everything we do we do for a purpose, to get something or somewhere. But in meditation this attitude can be a real obstacle. That is because meditation is different from all other human activities. Although it takes a lot of work and energy of a certain kind, ultimately meditation is a non-doing. It has no goal other than for you to be yourself. The irony is that you already are. This sounds paradoxical and a little crazy. Yet this paradox and craziness may be pointing you toward a new way of seeing yourself, one in which you are trying less, and being more. This comes from intentionally cultivating the attitude of non-striving.

For example, if you sit down to meditate and you think, "I am going to get relaxed, or get enlightened, or control my pain, or become a better person," then you have introduced an idea into your mind of where you should be, and along with it comes the notion that you are not okay right now. "If I were only more calm, or more intelligent, or a harder worker, or more this or more that, if only my heart were healthier or my knee were better, then I would be okay. But right now, I am not okay."

This attitude undermines the cultivation of mindfulness, which involves simply paying attention to whatever is happening. If you are tense, then just pay attention to the tension. If you are in pain, then be with the pain as best you can. If you are criticizing yourself, then observe the activity of the judging mind. Just watch. Remember, we are simply allowing anything and everything that we experience from moment to moment to be here, because it already is.

People are sent to the stress clinic by their doctors because something is the matter. The first time they come, we ask them to identify three goals they want to work toward in the program. But then, often to their surprise, we encourage them not to try to make any progress toward their goals over the eight weeks. In particular, if one of their goals is to lower their blood pressure or to reduce their pain or anxiety, they are instructed to not to try to lower their blood pressure nor to try to make their pain or their anxiety go away, but simply to stay in the present and carefully follow the meditation instructions.

As you will see shortly, in the meditative domain, the best way to achieve your own goals is to back off from striving for results and instead to start focusing carefully on seeing and accepting things as they are, moment by moment. With patience and regular practice, movement toward your goals will take place by itself. This movement becomes an unfolding that you are inviting to happen within you.

6. Acceptance

Acceptance means seeing things as they actually are in the present. If you have a headache, accept that you have a headache. If you are overweight, why not accept it as a description of your body at this time? Sooner or later we have to come to terms with things as they are and accept them, whether it is a diagnosis of cancer or learning of someone's death. Often acceptance is only reached after we have gone through very emotion-filled periods of denial and then anger. These stages are a natural progression in the process of coming to terms with what is. They are all part of the healing process.

However, putting aside for the moment the major calamities that usually take a great deal of time to heal from, in the course of our daily lives we often waste a lot of energy denying and resisting what is already fact. When we do that, we are basically trying to force situations to be the way we would like them to be which only makes for more tension. This actually prevents positive change from occurring. We may be so busy denying and forcing and struggling that we have little energy left for healing and growing, and what little we have may be dissipated by our lack of awareness and intentionality.

If you are overweight and feel bad about your body, it's no good to wait until you are the weight you think you should be before you start liking your body and yourself. At a certain point, if you don't want to remain stuck in a frustrating vicious cycle, you might realize that it is all right to love yourself at the weight that you are now because this is the only time you can love yourself. Remember, now is the only time you have for anything. You have to accept yourself as you are before, you can really change.

When you start thinking this way, losing weight becomes less important. It also becomes a lot easier. By intentionally cultivating acceptance, you are creating the preconditions for healing.

Acceptance does not mean that you have to like everything or that you have to take a passive attitude toward everything and abandon your principles and values. It does not mean that you are satisfied with things as they are or that you are resigned to tolerating things as they "have to be." It does not mean that you should stop trying to break free of your own self-destructive habits or to give up on your desire to change and grow, or that you should tolerate injustice, for instance, or avoid getting involved in changing the world around you because it is the way it is and therefore hopeless. Acceptance as we are speaking of it simply means that you have come around to a willingness to see things as they are. This attitude sets the stage for acting appropriately in your life, no matter what is happening. You are much more likely to know what to do and have the inner conviction to act when you have a clear picture of what is actually happening than when your vision is clouded by your mind's self-serving judgments and desires or its fears and prejudices.

In the meditation practice, we cultivate acceptance by taking each moment as it comes and being with it fully, as it is. We try not to impose our ideas about what we should be feeling or thinking or seeing on our experience but just remind ourselves to be receptive and open to whatever we are feeling, thinking, or seeing, and to accept it because it is here right now. If we keep our attention focused on the present, we can be sure of one thing, namely that whatever we are attending to in this moment will change, giving us the opportunity to practice accepting whatever it is that will emerge in the next moment. Clearly there is wisdom in cultivating acceptance.

7. Letting Go

They say that in India there is a particularly clever way of catching monkeys. As the story goes, hunters will cut a hole in a coconut that is just big enough for a monkey to put its hand through. Then they will drill two smaller holes in the other end, pass a wire through, and secure the coconut to the base of a tree. Then they put a banana inside the coconut and hide. The monkey comes down, puts his hand in and takes hold of the banana. The hole is crafted so that the open hand can go in but the fist cannot get out. All the monkey has to do to be free is to let go of the banana. But it seems most monkeys don't let go. Often our minds get us caught in very much the same way in spite of all our intelligence. For this reason, cultivating the attitude of letting go, or nonattachment, is fundamental to the practice of mindfulness. When we start paying attention to our inner experience, we rapidly discover that there are certain thoughts and feelings and situations that the mind seems to want to hold on to. If they are pleasant, we try to prolong these thoughts or feelings or situations, stretch them out, and conjure them up again and again. Similarly there are many thoughts and feelings and experiences that we try to get rid of or to prevent and protect ourselves from having because they are unpleasant and painful and frightening in one way or another. In the meditation practice we intentionally put aside the tendency to elevate some aspects of our experience and to reject others. Instead we just let our experience be what it is and practice observing it from moment to moment. Letting go is a way of letting things be, of accepting things as they are. When we observe our own mind grasping and pushing away, we remind ourselves to let go of those impulses on purpose, just to see what will happen if we do. When we find ourselves judging our experience, we let go of those judging thoughts. We recognize them and we just don't pursue them any further. We let them be, and in doing so we let them go. Similarly, when thoughts of the past or of the future come up, we let go of them. We just watch.

If we find it particularly difficult to let go of something because it has such a strong hold over our mind, we can direct our attention to what "holding on" feels like. Holding on is the opposite of letting go. We can become an expert on our own attachments, whatever they may be and their consequences in our lives, as well as how it feels in those moments when we finally do let go and what the consequences of that are. Being willing to look at the ways we hold on ultimately shows us a lot about the experience of its opposite: so whether we are "successful" at letting go or not, mindfulness continues to teach us if we are willing to look.

Letting go is not such a foreign experience. We do it every night when we go to sleep. We lie down on a padded surface, with the lights out, in a quiet place, and we let go of our mind and body. If you can't let go, you can't go to sleep. Most of us have experienced times when the mind would just not shut down when we got into bed. This is one of the first signs of elevated stress. At these times we may be unable to free ourselves from certain thoughts because our involvement in them is just too powerful. If we try to force ourselves to sleep, it just makes things worse. So if you can go to sleep, you are already an expert in letting go. Now you just need to practice applying this skill in waking situations as well.



Don't turn away.

Keep your gaze on the bandaged place.

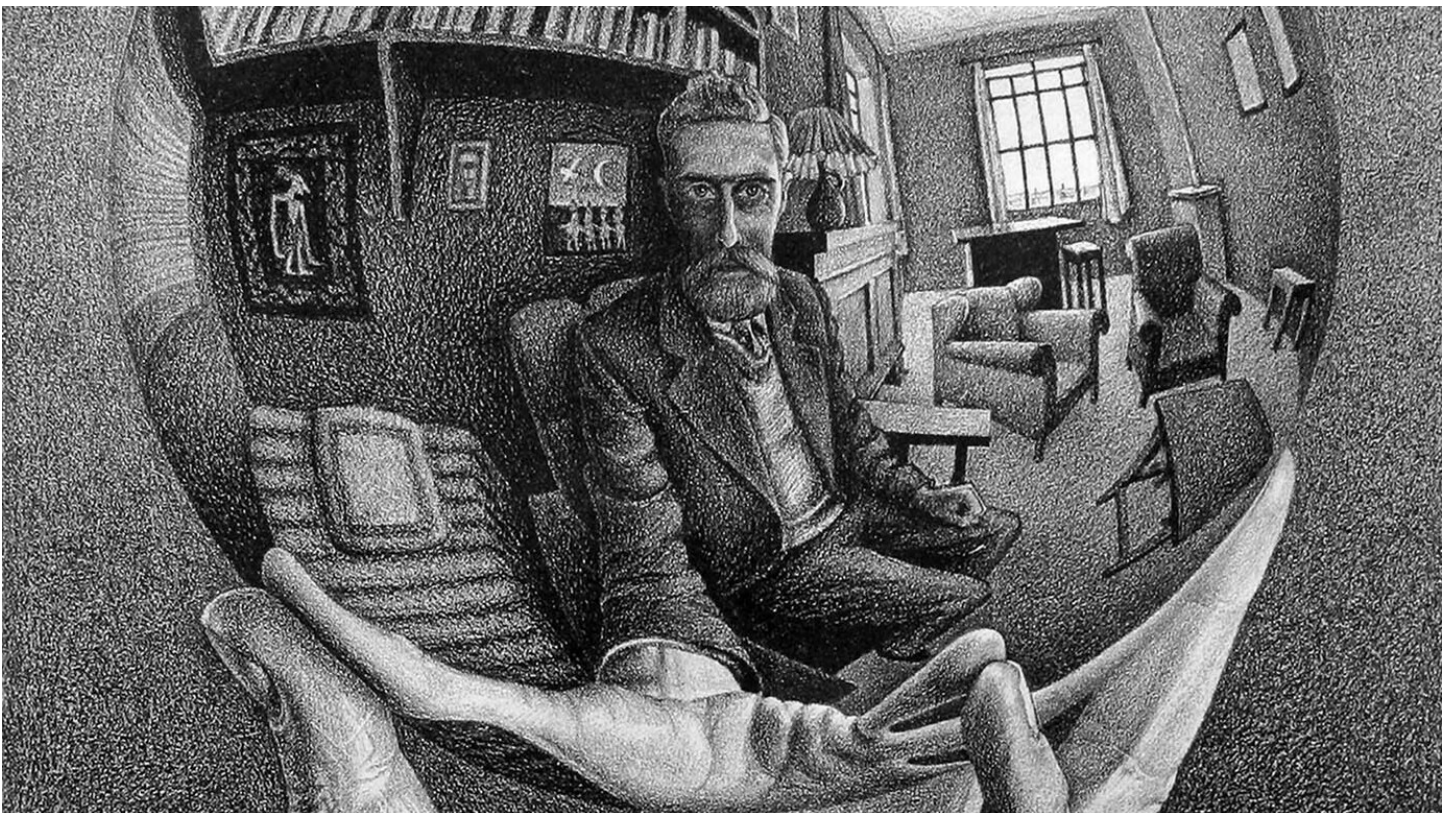
That's where the light enters you.

Rumi

Class 2

All things are subject to interpretation. Whichever interpretation prevails at a given time is a function of power and not truth.

Friedrich Nietzsche



The range of what we think and do is limited by what we fail to notice. And because we fail to notice there is little we can do to change until we notice how failing to notice shapes our thoughts and deeds.

RD Lang

If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading.

Lao-Tzu

We don't see things as they are. We see things as we are.

Talmud

Informal Mindfulness Practice

Mindfulness in Your Morning Routine

Pick an activity that constitutes part of your daily morning routine, such as brushing your teeth, shaving, making the bed, or taking a shower. When you do it, totally focus attention on what you're doing: the body movements, the taste, the touch, the smell, the sight, the sound, and so on. Notice what's happening with an attitude of openness and curiosity. For example, when you're in the shower, notice the sounds of the water as it sprays out of the nozzle, as it hits your body, and as it gurgles down the drain. Notice the temperature of the water, and the feel of it in your hair, and on your shoulders, and running down your legs. Notice the smell of the soap and shampoo, and the feel of them against your skin. Notice the sight of the water droplets on the walls or shower curtain, the water dripping down your body and the steam rising upward. Notice the movements of your arms as you wash or scrub or shampoo. When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, and let them come and go like passing cars. Again and again, you may get caught up in your thoughts. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what the thought was that distracted you, and bring your attention back to the shower.

Mindfulness of Domestic Chores

Pick an activity such as ironing clothes, washing dishes, vacuuming floors. Something mundane that you have to do to make your life work-and do it mindfully. For example, when ironing clothes, notice the color and shape of the clothing, and the pattern made by the creases, and the new pattern as the creases disappear. Notice the hiss of the steam, the creak of the ironing board, the faint sound of the iron moving over the material. Notice the grip of your hand on the iron, and the movement of your arm and your shoulder. If boredom or frustration arises, simply acknowledge it, and bring your attention back to the task at hand. When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and bring your attention back to what you're doing. Again and again, your attention will wander. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to your current activity.

Mindfulness of Pleasant Activities

Pick an activity you enjoy such as cuddling with a loved one, eating lunch, stroking the cat, playing with the dog, walking in the park, listening to music, having a soothing hot bath, and so on. Do this activity mindfully: engage in it fully, using all five of your senses, and savor every moment. If and when your attention wanders, as soon as you realize it, note what distracted you, and re-engage in whatever you're doing.

Attentional Focus Meditation

The directions below address mindfulness of the breath. And you may decide to use the breath as your primary object of attention. However, other objects you may select are sounds, body sensations—particularly touchpoints.

1. Settle into a comfortable sitting position, either on a straight-backed chair or on a soft surface on the floor, with your buttocks supported by cushions or a low stool. If you use a chair, it is very helpful to sit away from the back of the chair, so that your spine is self-supporting. If you sit on the floor, it is helpful if your knees actually touch the floor; experiment with the height of the cushions or stool until you feel comfortable and firmly supported.
2. Allow your back to adopt an erect, dignified, and comfortable posture. If sitting on a chair, place your feet flat on the floor, with your legs uncrossed. Gently close your eyes. It help to imagine a light thread attached to the crown of your head pulling your head gently upwards and allowing your spine to lengthen.
3. Bring your awareness to the level of physical sensations by focusing your attention on the sensations of touch and pressure in your body where it makes contact with the floor and whatever you are sitting on. Spend a minute or two exploring these sensations.
4. Now bring your awareness to the changing patterns of physical sensations in the lower abdomen as the breath moves in and out of your body (When you first try this practice, it be helpful to place your hand on your lower abdomen and become aware of the changing pattern of sensations where your hand makes contact with your abdomen, Having "tuned in" to the physical sensations in this area in this way, you can remove your hand and continue to focus on the sensations in the abdominal wall.)

5. Focus your awareness on the sensations of slight stretching as the abdominal wall rises with each in breath, and of gentle deflation as it falls with each outbreath. As best you can, follow with your awareness the changing physical sensations in the lower abdomen all the way through as the breath enters your body on the in breath and all the way through as the breath leaves your body on the outbreath, perhaps noticing the slight pauses between one in breath and the following outbreath, and between one outbreath and the following in breath.
6. There is no need to try to control the breathing in any way—simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can, also bring this attitude of allowing to the rest of your experience. There is nothing to be fixed, no particular state to be achieved. As best you can, simply allow your experience to be your experience, without needing it to be other than it is.
7. Sooner or later, your mind will wander away from the focus on the breath in the lower abdomen to thoughts, planning, daydreams, drifting along—whatever. This is perfectly OK. It's simply what minds do. It is not a mistake or a failure. When you notice that your awareness is no longer on the breath, gently congratulate yourself—you have come back and are once more aware of your experience! You want to acknowledge briefly where the mind has been ("Ah, there's thinking"). Then, gently escort the awareness back to a focus on the changing pattern of physical sensations in the lower abdomen, renewing the intention to pay attention to the ongoing in breath or outbreath, whichever you find.
8. However often you notice that the mind has wandered (and this will quite likely happen over and over and over again), as best you can, congratulate yourself each time on reconnecting with your experience in the moment, gently escorting the attention back to the breath, and simply resume following in awareness the changing pattern of physical sensations that come with each inbreath and outbreath.
9. As best you can, bring a quality of kindness to your awareness, perhaps seeing the repeated wanderings of the mind as opportunities to bring patience and gentle curiosity to your experience.

10. Remind yourself from time to time that the intention is simply to be aware of your experience in each moment, as best you can, using the breath as an anchor to gently reconnect with the here and now each time you notice that your mind has wandered.
11. Mindfulness exercises are best done before eating, i.e. before breakfast or the evening meal. If you have had a drink or used any other drugs, allow their effects to wear off before trying to meditate.

Class 3

There were times when I could not afford to sacrifice the bloom of the present moment to any work, whether of the head or hands. I love a broad margin to my life. Sometimes, in a summer morning, having taken my accustomed bath, I sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise till noon, rapt in a revery, amidst the pines and hickories and sumachs, in undisturbed solitude and stillness, while the birds sing around or flitted noiseless through the house, until by the sun falling in at my west window, or the noise of some traveller's wagon on the distant highway, I was reminded of the lapse of time.

Henry David Thoreau: Walden



Realize deeply that the present moment is all that you ever have.

Eckhart Tolle

The mind is like the wind and the body is like the sand; if you want to know how the wind is blowing, look at the sand.

Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen

Our true home is in the present moment.

To live in the present moment is a miracle.

The miracle is not to walk on water.

The miracle is to walk on the green Earth in the present moment,
to appreciate the peace and beauty that are available now.

Peace is all around us—

in the world and the nature—

and within us—

in our bodies and our spirits.

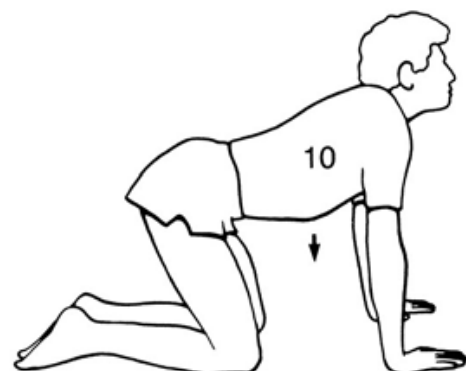
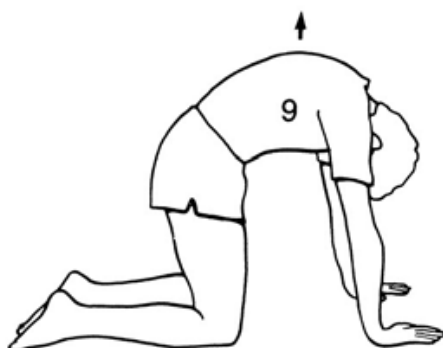
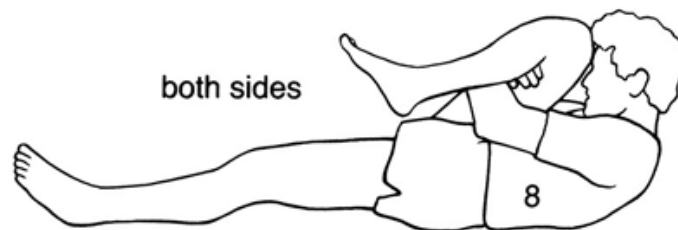
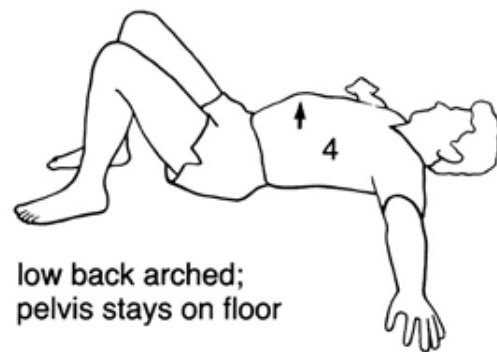
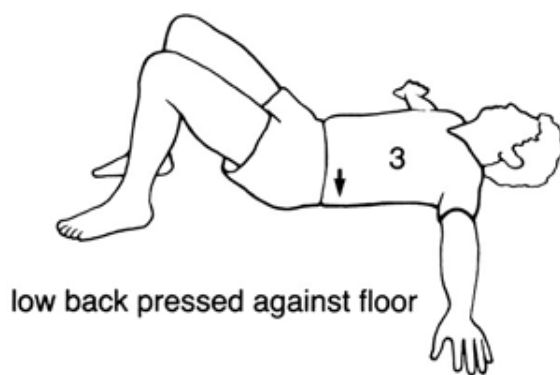
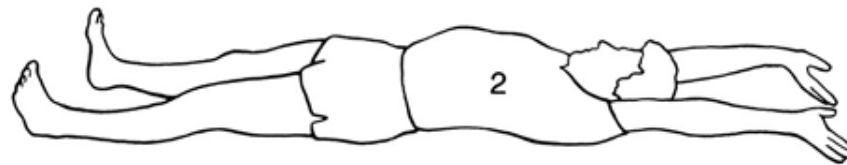
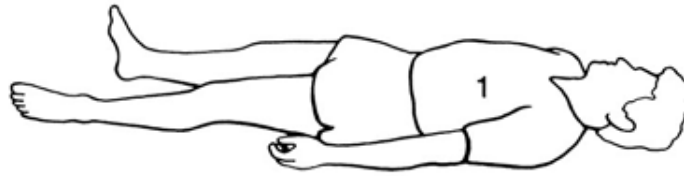
Once we learn to touch this peace,
we will be healed and transformed.

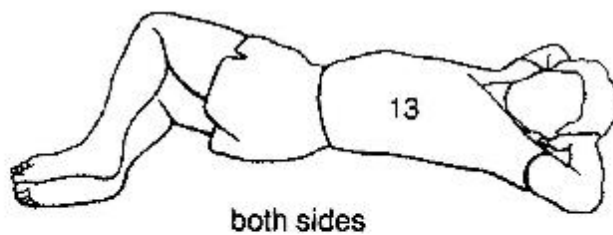
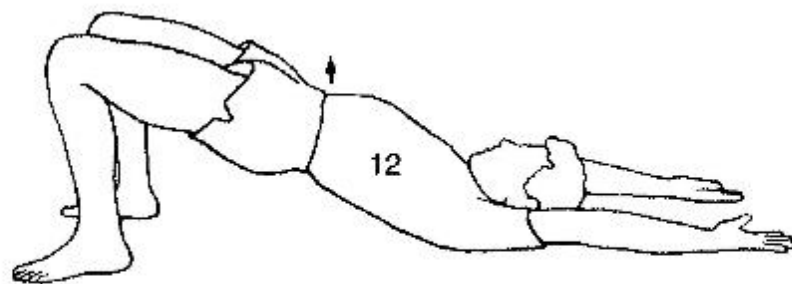
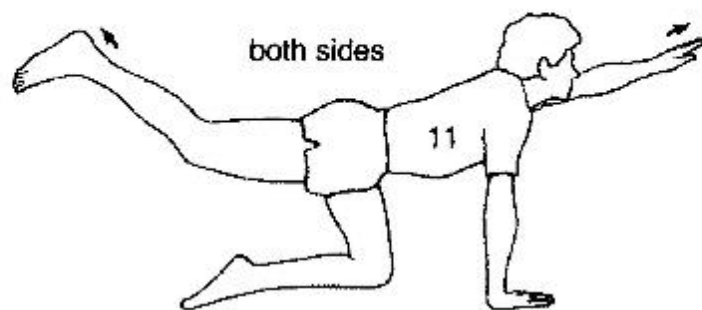
It is not a matter of faith;

it is a matter of practice.

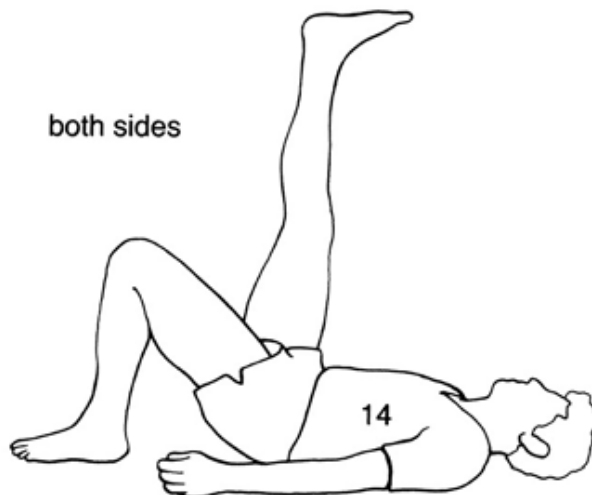
Thich Nhat Hanh

Lying Down Yoga – Sequence of Postures

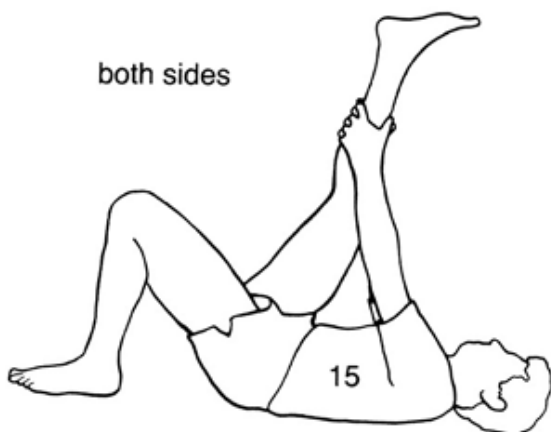




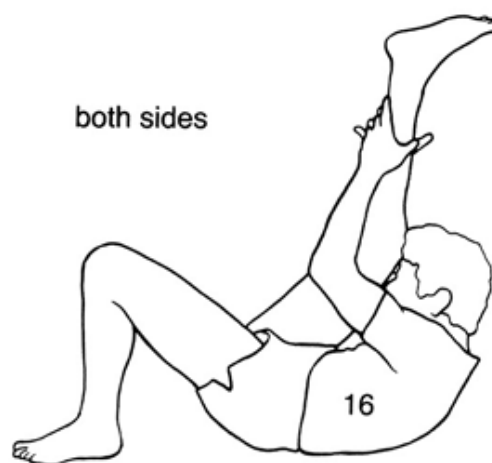
both sides



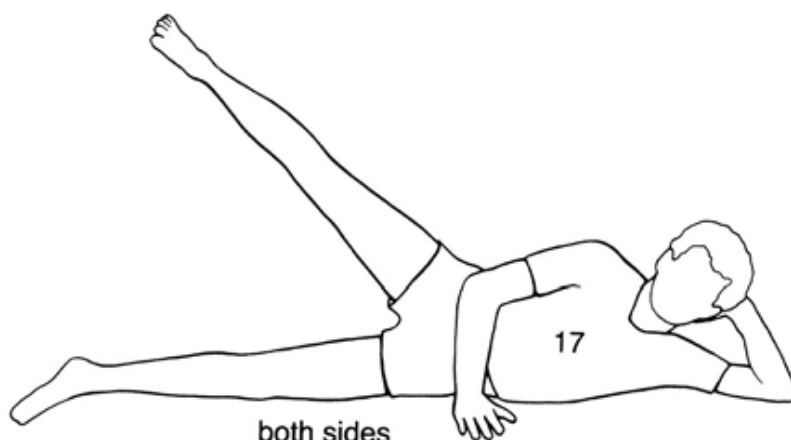
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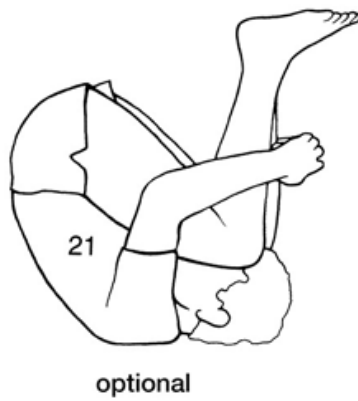
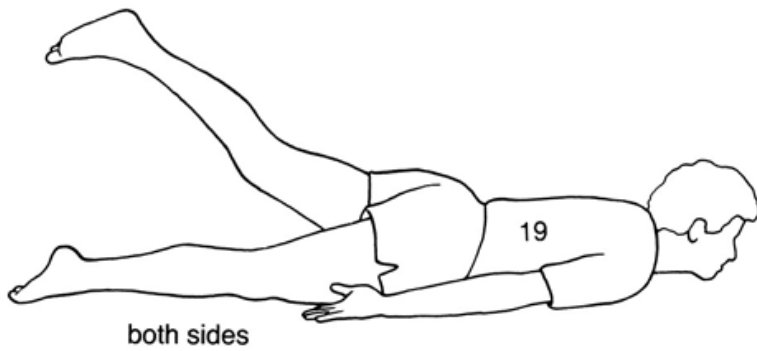


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both sides





Blocks to Listening

Here are 12 blocks to listening. You will find that some are old favorites that you use over and over. Others are held in reserve for certain types of people and situations. Everyone uses listening blocks, so you shouldn't worry if a lot of blocks are familiar. This is an opportunity to become more aware of your blocks at the time you actually see (use) them.

Comparing. Comparing makes it hard to listen because you're always trying to assess who is smarter, more competent, more emotionally healthy – you or the other person. Some people focus on who has suffered more, who's a bigger victim. You can't let much in because you're too busy seeing if you measure up.

Mind Reading. The mind reader doesn't pay much attention to what people say. In fact, he often distrusts it. He's trying to figure out what the other person is really thinking and feeling. The mind reader pays less attention to words than to intonations and subtle cues in effort to see through the truth. If you are a mind reader, you probably make assumptions about how people react to you. "I bet he's looking at my lousy skin...She thinks I'm stupid."

Rehearsing. You don't have time to listen when you're rehearsing what to say. Your whole attention is on the preparation and crafting of your next comment. You have to look interested, but your mind is going a mile a minute because you've got a story to tell, or a point to make. Some people rehearse whole chains of response: "I'll say, then he'll say, then I'll say", and so on.

Filtering. When you filter, you listen to some things but not others. You pay only enough attention to see if somebody's angry, or unhappy or if you're in emotional danger. Once assured that the communication contains none of these things, you let your mind wander. Another way people filter is to avoid hearing certain things – particularly anything threatening, negative, critical or unpleasant. It's as if the words were never said: you simply have no memory of them.

Judging. Negative labels have enormous power. If you prejudge someone as stupid or nuts, or unqualified, you don't pay much attention to what they say. You've already written them off. Hastily judging a statement as immoral, hypocritical, or crazy means you've ceased to listen and have begun a knee jerk reaction. A basic rule of listening is that judgments should only be made after you have heard and evaluated the content of the message.

Being Right. Being right means you will go to any lengths (twist the facts, start shouting, make excuses or accusations, call up past sins) to avoid being wrong. You can't listen to criticism, you can't be corrected, and you can't take suggestions to change. Since you won't acknowledge that your mistakes are mistakes, you just keep making them.

Dreaming. You're half listening and something the person says suddenly triggers a chain of private associations. Your neighbor says he's been laid off and in a flash you're off to the scene where you got fired for playing hearts on those long coffee breaks. You're gone, only to return a few minutes later as your neighbor is saying, "I knew you'd understand, but don't tell my husband". You are more prone to dreaming when you feel bored or anxious, but if you dream a lot with certain people, it may indicate a lack of commitment to knowing or appreciating them or that you don't value what they say very much.

Identifying. In this block, you take everything a person tells you and refer it back to your own experience. They want to tell you about a toothache, but that reminds you of the time you had oral surgery for receding gums. You launch into your story before they can finish theirs. Everything you hear reminds you of something you've felt, done or suffered. You're so busy with these exciting tales of your life that there's no time to really hear or get to know the other person.

Advising. You are the great problem-solver, ready with help and suggestions. You don't have to hear more than a few sentences before you begin to search for the right advice. However, while you're cooking up suggestions and convincing someone to "just try it" you may miss what's most important. You didn't hear the feelings, and you didn't acknowledge the person's pain. He or she still feels basically alone because you didn't listen or just BE there.

Sparring. This block has you arguing and debating with people. The other person never feels heard because you're so quick to disagree. In fact, a lot of your focus is on finding things to disagree with. You take strong stands, are very clear about your beliefs and preferences. One sub type of sparring is the 'put down'. You use acerbic or sarcastic remarks to dismiss the other person's point of view. A second type of sparring is 'discounting'. Discounting is for people who can't stand compliments. Oh I didn't do anything....what do you mean? "It's nice of you to say but it's really a very poor attempt". This basic technique of discounting is to run yourself down when you get a compliment. The other person never feels satisfied that you really heard his/her appreciation. And he/she is right you didn't.

Derailing. This listening block is accomplished by suddenly changing the subject. You derail the train of conversation when you get bored or uncomfortable with a topic. Another way of derailing is by joking it off. This means that you continually respond to whatever is said with a quick joke or quip in order to avoid the discomfort or anxiety in seriously listening to the other person.

Placating. "Right....Right.....Absolutely.....I know....Of course you are.... Incredible.... yes.... Really?" You want to be nice, pleasant, supportive. You want people to like you. So you agree with everything. You may Half-listen, just enough to get the drift, but you're not really involved. You are placating rather than tuning in and examining what is being said.
Hope Morrow

Class 4

“How many of you here have a family history of heart disease? Cancer? High blood pressure? Ulcers? Stroke? Wow, there’s a hand that’s not even going down between the questions. That’s not good.

How many of you have a family history of someone with a really bad case of leprosy? [laughter] No hands. Dysentery? Not that either. How about that relative who’s just teeming with liver parasites the size of your fists? Not much there either.

We are not like normal animals. We don’t get sick the way normal animals do. We don’t die the way they do.

What we have entered is this world that when we look at the diseases that do us in... diseases of slow accumulation of damage from lifestyle over time. They are predominantly diseases that can be caused by or made worse by stress.”

Dr Robert Sapolsky



There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all of time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and it will be lost. The world will not have it. It is not your business to determine how good it is nor how valuable nor how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep it yours clearly and directly, to keep the channel open.

Martha Graham

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

Viktor Frankl

Stress Response in the Body

Stress response is adaptive, healthy coping.

Stress reactions happen automatically. As soon as you bring awareness to what is going on in a stressful situation you have already changed that situation by being conscious. You are no longer unconscious and on autopilot. Bringing mindfulness to the stress reaction gives you a range of options for influencing what happens next. It introduces an entirely different kind of control.

Things that used to push your buttons may not bother you anymore or you don't release the same hormones and chemicals. Arousal is less, recovery is quicker.

Inattention			Intention
Dis		connection	Looking leads to connection.
Dis		regulation	Knowing connects you to resiliency and inner
Dis		order	strength.
Dis		ease	Which brings good regulation Which brings ease

Mindful S.T.O.P.



"The goal of this exercise isn't to change how you feel but to come out of automatic pilot and notice things just as they are."

STOP

S

Stop for just a moment. Don't react. Give yourself the gift of brief reflection.

TAKE A BREATH

T

Breathe in and out. Track your breath. Sense the chest rising and falling.

OBSERVE YOUR EXPERIENCE

O

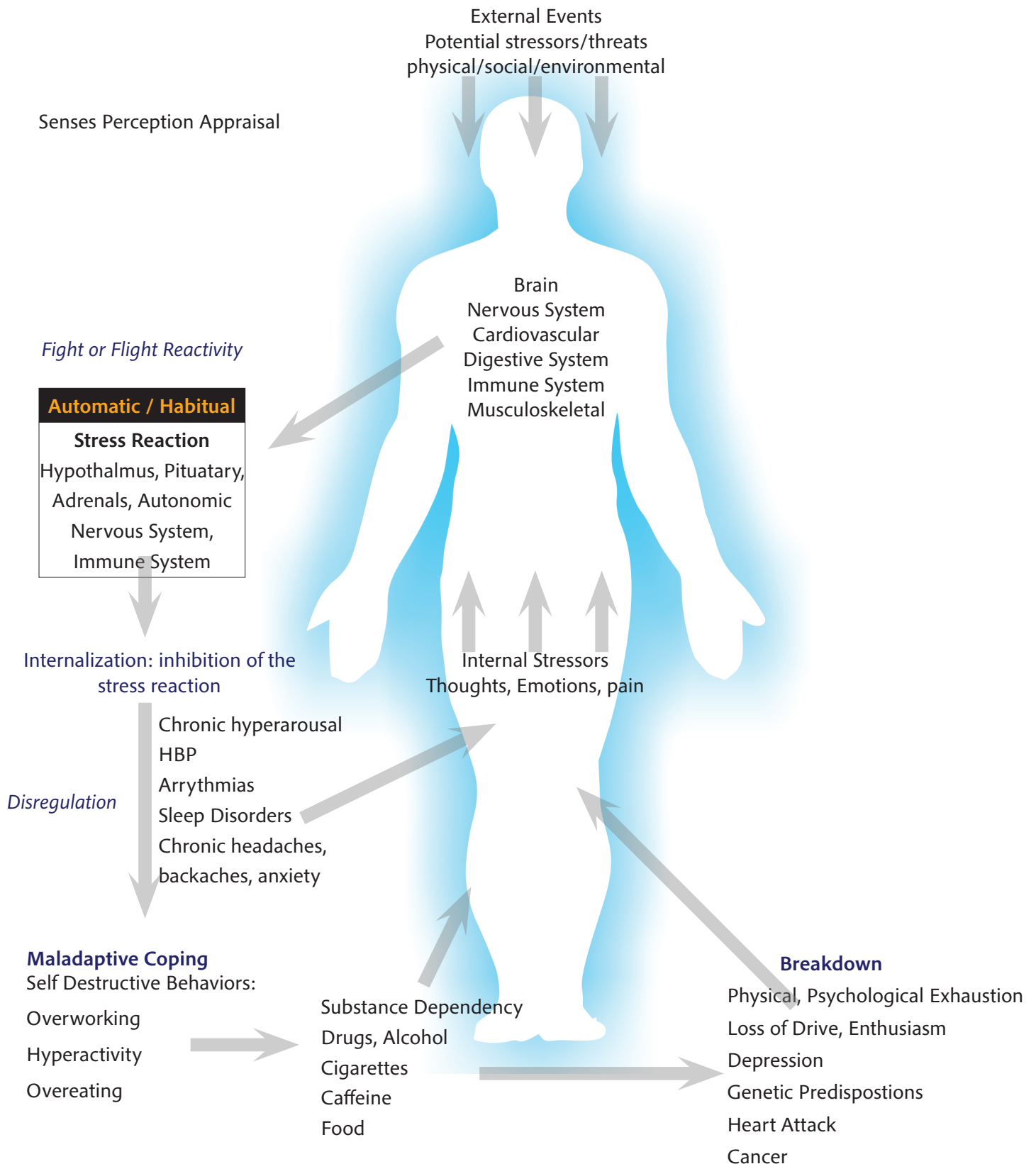
Observe the sensations in the body. Observe the thoughts going through your mind. Appreciate that thoughts are not facts and get a sense of where you are in this moment.

PROCEED MINDFULLY

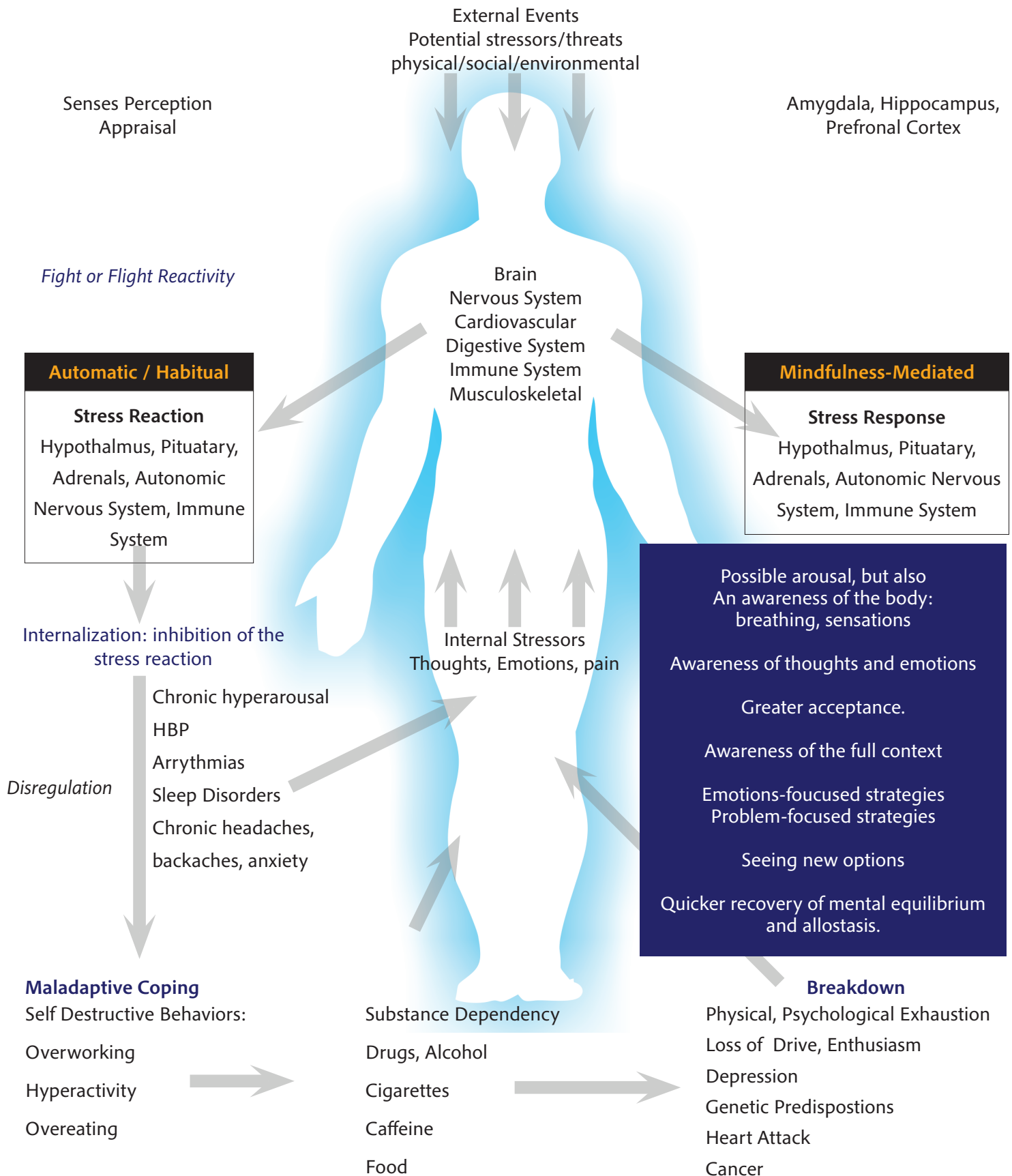
P

Proceed mindfully with kindness in a way that feels right to you and is consistent with your values.

The Stress Reaction Cycle



Coping with Stress Responding Vs Reacting



Mindful Movement. An Awareness Practice.

Mindful yoga invites us to observe the arising and passing of sensations, thoughts, and emotions, like clouds within the all-embracing sky of awareness.

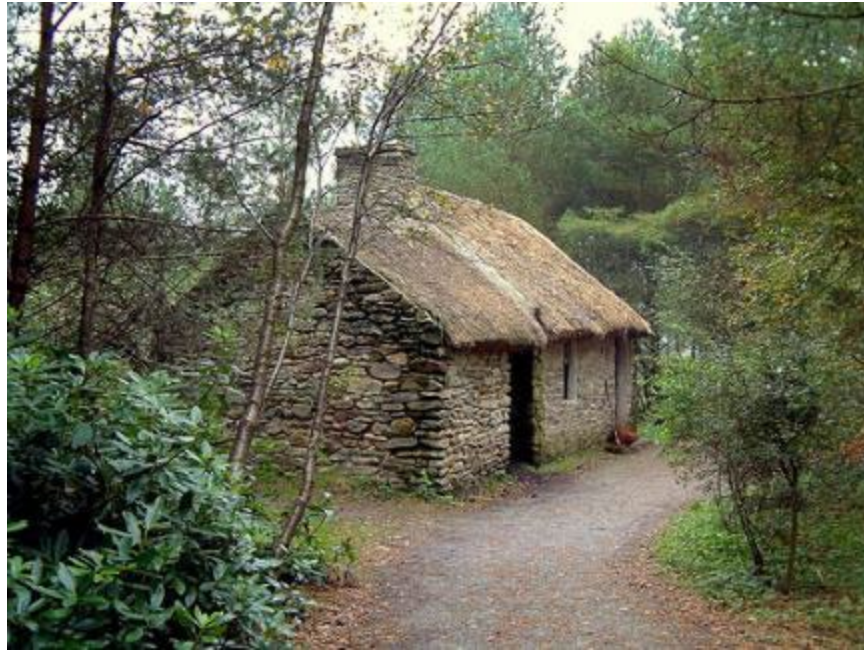
Some of us are reluctant to exercise because it involves discomfort or strain, or requires special equipment or others to work out with, or going to a special place to do it. If this has been the case for you, then mindful hatha yoga may be just the practice you have been waiting for.

The word “yoga” means “yoke” in Sanskrit and implies a harnessing together and a unifying of body and mind. Yoga is a form of meditation, and when done regularly, is an excellent mind/body discipline for people who wish to move towards greater levels of health.

Hatha consists of postures done mindfully and with awareness of breathing. They are easily learned and have dramatic effects if practiced regularly. The ones we are doing are extremely gentle. Regular practice will increase your musculoskeletal flexibility, strength, and balance, as well as help you enter states of deep relaxation and awareness. Many people experience a greater serenity about life in general, improved circulation, a firmer, trimmer figure, and less illness as a result.

In practicing yoga, you are advised to practice in the same way that you when meditating, namely maintaining moment to moment awareness, and not striving to get somewhere, just allowing yourself to be as you are, and letting go of any judgments. Move slowly and consciously. Mindful yoga involves exploring your limits but not pushing beyond them. Instead, you play with dwelling at the boundary and breathe. This requires honoring your body and the messages it gives you about when to stop and when to avoid doing a posture because of your condition.

Yoga requires no special equipment and can be done almost anywhere. You can learn it from the Stress Reduction Program recording, and then go on to invent your own postures, and get other ideas from Yoga books, online resources, and classes. Experiment mindfully.



The Guest House

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice.
meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.
Be grateful for whatever comes.
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

Jellaludin Rumi

Class 5

When faced with any difficulty of life, resolve it by following these four steps: face it, accept it, deal with it, and then let it go.

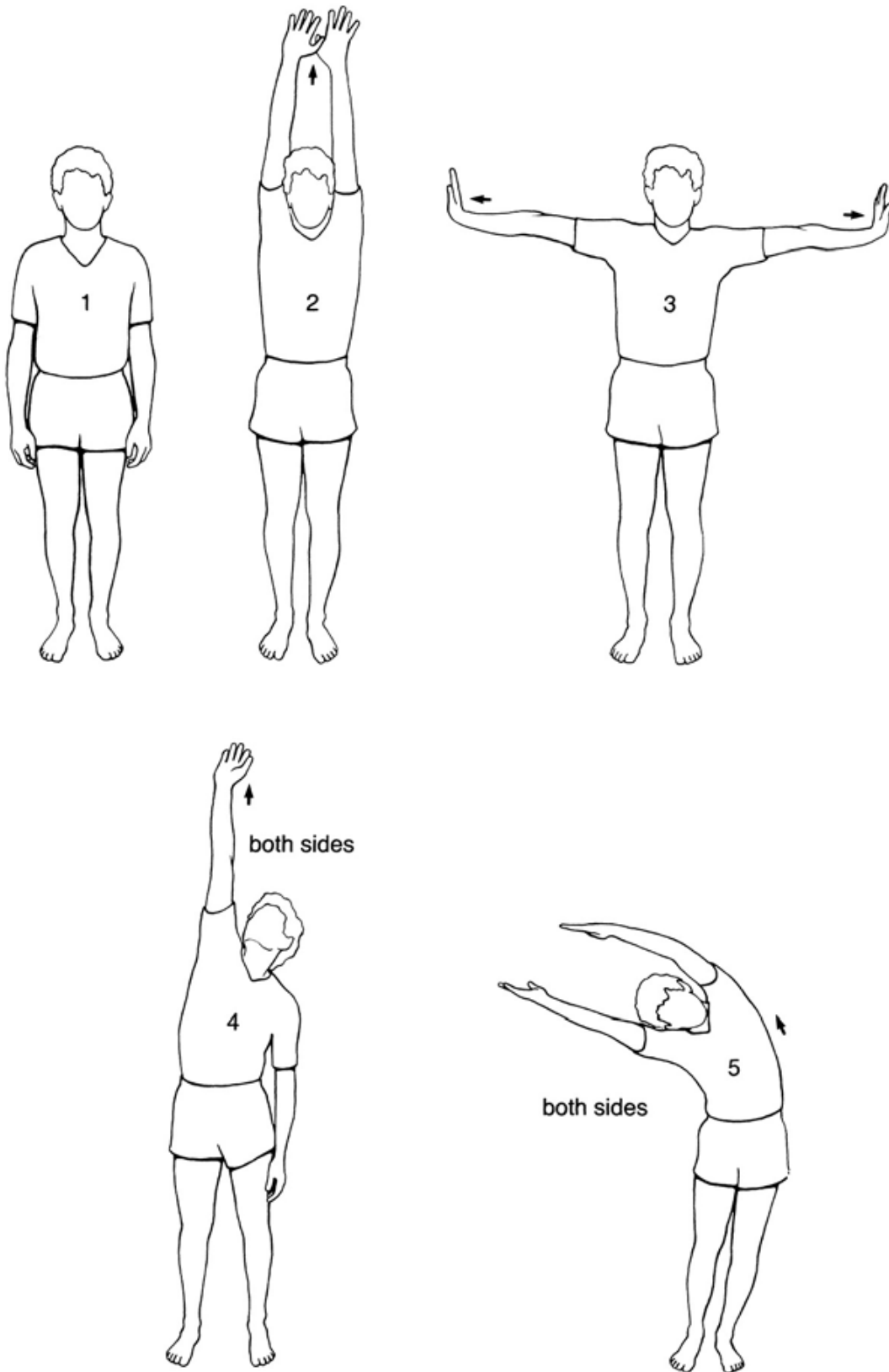
Sheng-Yen



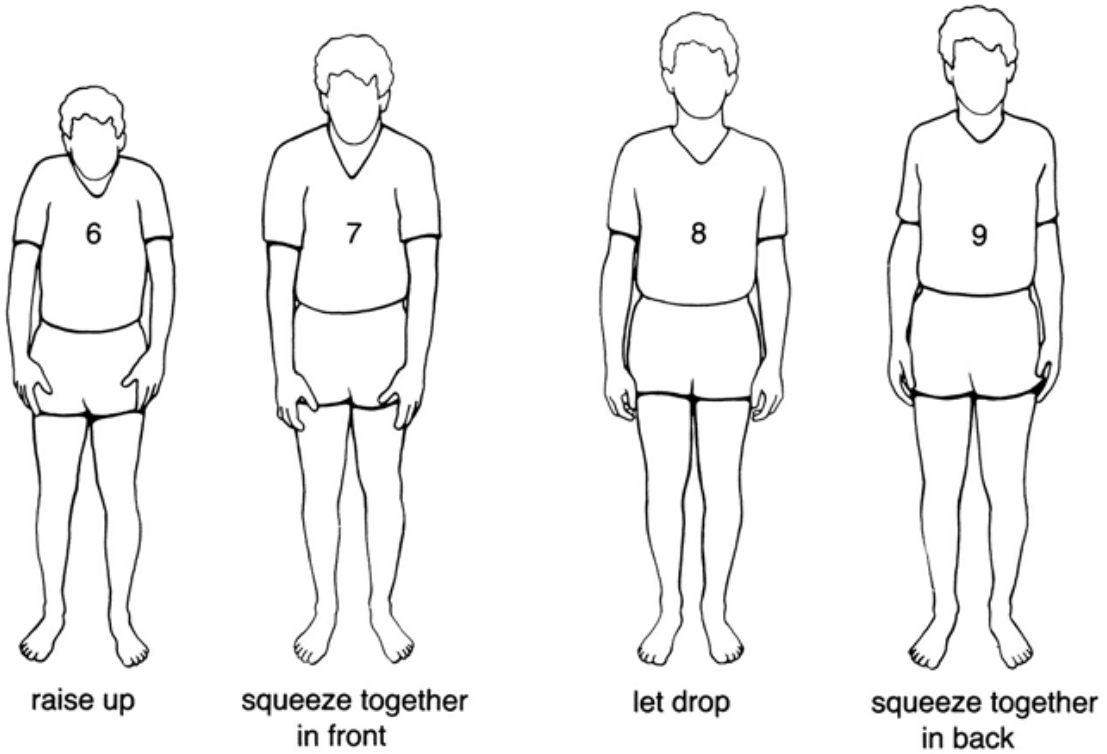
Transformation. For a seed to achieve its greatest expression, it must come completely undone. The shell cracks, its insides come out and everything changes. To someone who doesn't understand growth, it would look like complete destruction.

Cynthia Occelli

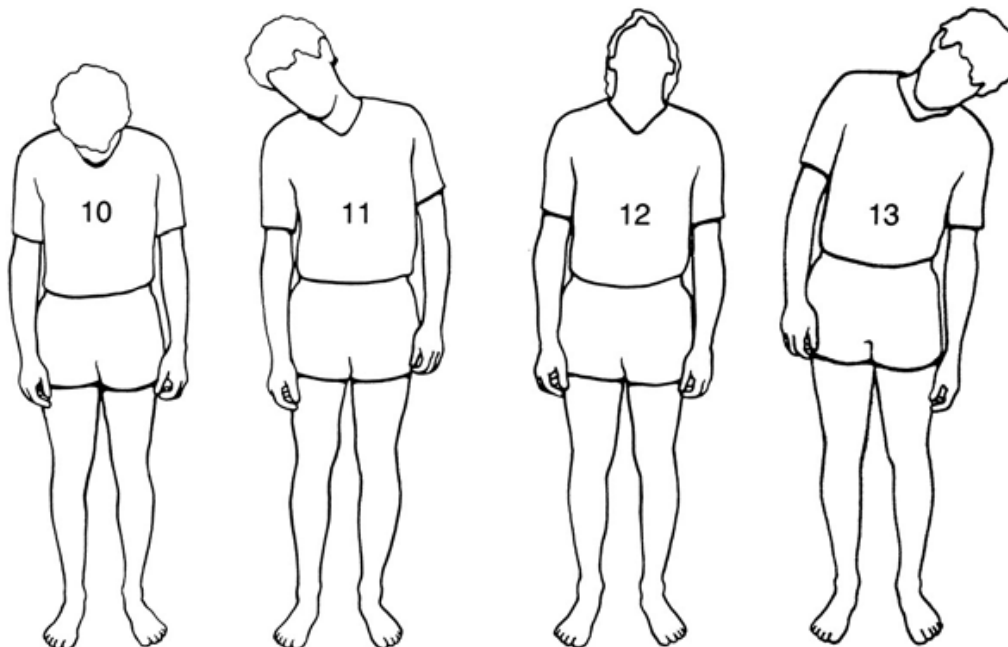
Standing Yoga – Sequence of Postures

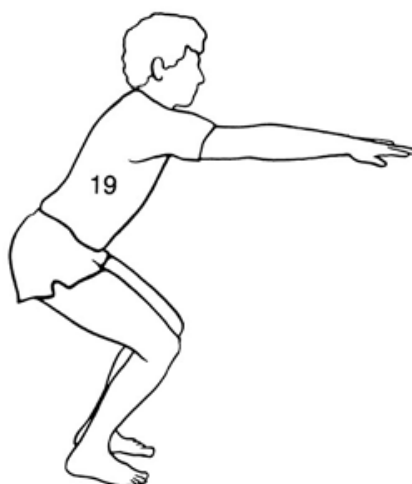
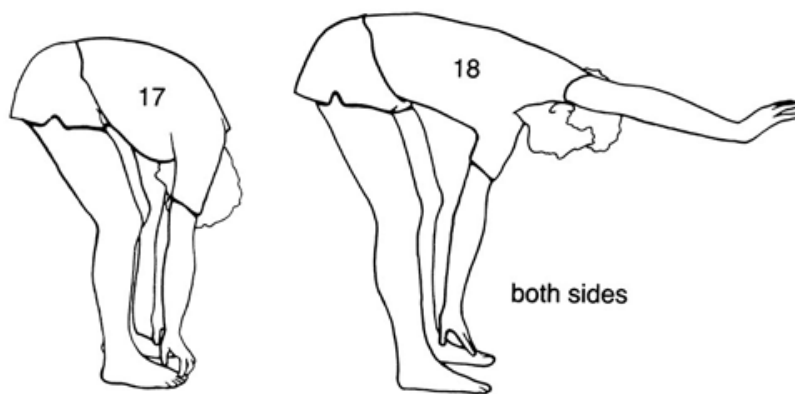
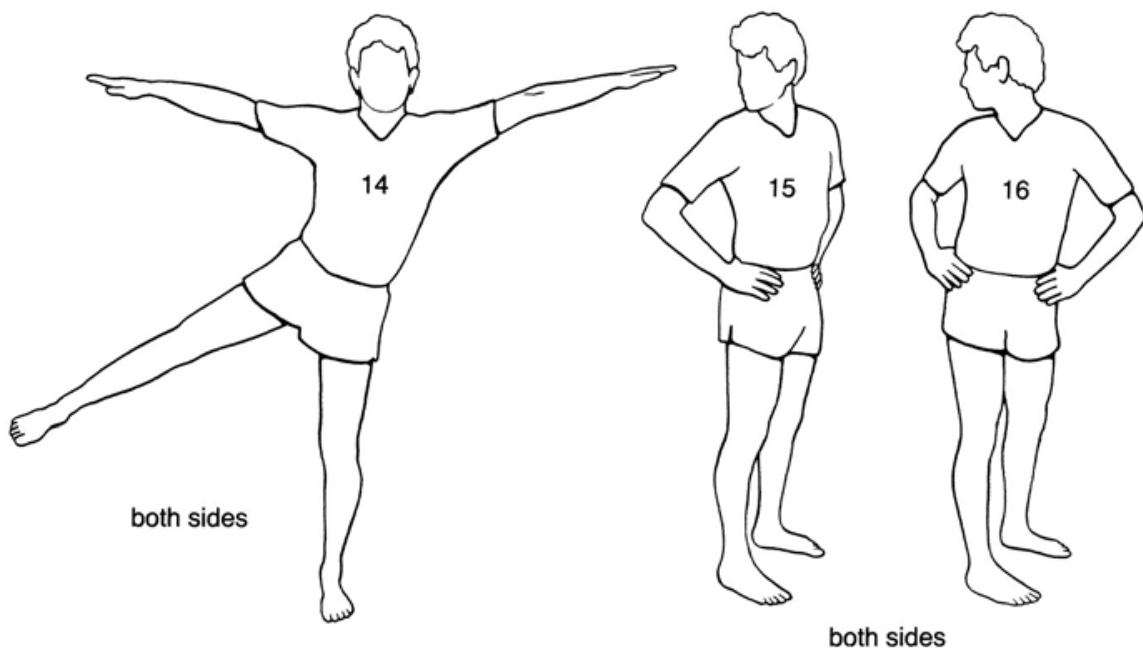


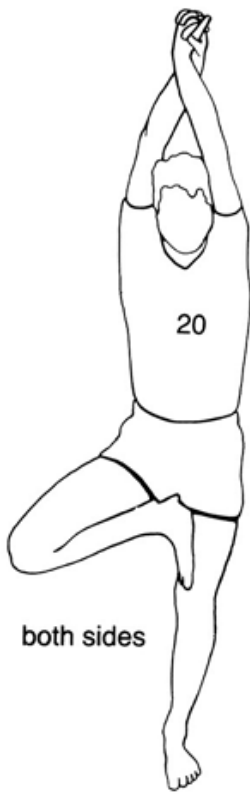
shoulder rolls: do in forward, then backward directions



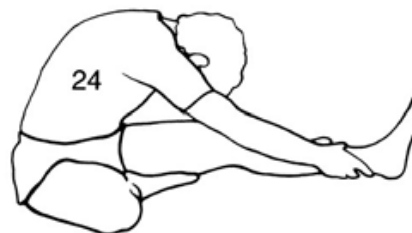
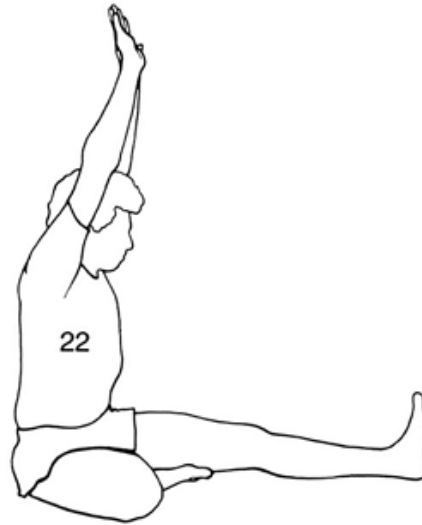
neck rolls: do in one direction, then the other







both sides



repeat 22 to 24 on other side



Cognitive Distortions. A Checklist

All-or-nothing thinking

You look at things in absolute black and white terms.

Overgeneralization

You view a negative event as a never-ending pattern or defeat.

Mental filter

You dwell on negatives.

Discounting the positives

You insist that your accomplishments or positive qualities don't count.

Jumping to conclusions

Mind reading – You assume that people are reacting negatively to you when there's no definite evidence to support that view.

Fortune telling – You arbitrarily predict that things will turn out badly.

Magnification or minimization

You blow things way out of proportion or shrink their importance.

Emotional reasoning

You reason from how you feel (e.g., I feel like an idiot, so I must be one).

Should statements

You criticize yourself or others with shoulds, oughts, musts, have to's, etc.

Labelling

Instead of saying, "I made a mistake". You tell yourself, "I'm a jerk, a fool or a loser".

Personalization and blame

You blame yourself for something you weren't entirely responsible for, or you blame other people and deny your role in the problem.

Class 6

See yourself in every eye you fear to look into.
Alice Walker



Loving Kindness Meditation

May I be safe and protected

May I be happy

May I be healthy

May I live my life with ease



Methods of Communication

Placate. So the other person doesn't get mad.

The Placater always talks in an ingratiating way, trying to please, apologizing, never disagreeing, no matter what. He is a yes man. He talks as though he could do nothing for himself; he must always get someone to approve of him.

Blame. So the other person will regard him as strong. The blamer is the fault finder, a dictator, a boss. She acts superior and seems to be saying, "if it weren't for you everything would be alright". The internal feeling is one of tightness in the muscles and in the organs. Meanwhile the blood pressure is increasing. The voice is hard, tight, and often shrill and loud.

Compute. With the resultant message that you are attempting to deal with the threat as though it were harmless, and you are trying to establish your self worth by using big words.

The computer is very correct, very reasonable with no semblance to any feeling showing. He is calm, cool, and collected. He can be compared to an actual computer or dictionary. The body feels dry, often cool and disassociated. The voice is dry, monotone and the words are likely to be abstract.

Distract. so you ignore the threat, behaving as though it were not there. (Maybe if you do this long enough, it will go away.) Whatever the distractor does or says is irrelevant to whatever anyone else is saying or doing. She never makes a response to the point. His internal feeling is one of dizziness. The voice can be singsong, often out of tune with the words, and can go up and down without reason because it is focused nowhere.

Levelling or Flowing. In this response, all parts of the message are going in the same direction. The voice says words that match the facial expression, the body position, and the voice tone. Relationships are easy, free and honest, and there are few threats to self esteem. With this response, there is no need to blame, retreat into a computer, or to be in perpetual motion.

Virginia Satir

Class 7

When a mist of multiplying thoughts fills your mind associations spinning
endlessly images jostling and memories whirling free-falling through your inner
space you can always bring yourself back to now.

This morning, making breakfast for the kids I catch myself daydreaming and
with a gentle mental nudge

Remind myself of where I am

And straight away the kitchen clutter turns to spacious presence

A mosaic of sunlit squares across the floor

Fading and brightening with the passing clouds

The metal rims of stools firing sparks

Steam-curls floating over cups

Reflecting silver spoons

The perfect stillness of spilt coffee grains

The gaudy yellow and blue of detergent bottles

And the window smudges exposed by sun -

Everything perfectly still and real

Everything perfectly itself.

Attention is an alchemy

That turns dullness to beauty

And anxiety to ease.

Steve Taylor



Beginning Your Lifelong Practice

Make a promise to yourself to sit for at least 30 seconds every day. Don't go to bed without sitting at least once

Leave your cushion out... you can only walk by so many times

Create a space that feels nice to practice in

10 minutes every day for 8 weeks will change your brain!

Take time to connect with your heart at least once per day. Either bringing to mind someone that loves you or that you love and just sit with that feeling of love and warmth inside of you and your heart center. You can also bring to mind someone that is suffering, is hurt, or in pain, connect with your heart and send them thoughts and feelings of love warmth compassion, and healing energy.

Being aware of the automatic pilot, habits, and patterns. Without judging yourself being grateful for the awareness and just trying to do your best.

Keep a journal of your practice.

You can go back to keeping a log of pleasant, and unpleasant events, as well as difficult communications.

Bring awareness to the connections between physical symptoms, ie-headaches, increased pain, palpitations, rapid breathing, muscle tension, moodiness etc. and preceding mental states and their origins.

Write down 3 things that you are grateful for at the end of every day.

Take time to be mindful in daily routines. Showering brushing teeth etc.

Set yourself up for success surround yourself with people and things that will support and nourish you. Notice when you don't.

Find local groups to sit with if you, go to yoga classes, read books, listen to podcasts, and go on retreat.

Participate in future MBSR day retreats.

Remember, the meditation bus never leaves. It travels in circles. If you get off the bus, you can always get back on.

A New Beginning

Walking the path of awareness requires that you keep up the meditation practice. If you don't the way tends to get overgrown and obscured. It becomes less accessible even though, at any moment that you choose, you can come back to it again because it is always right here. Even if you have not been practicing for some time, as soon as you are back with your breathing, back in the moment, you are right here again, back on the path.

In Fact, once you are cultivating mindfulness systematically in your life, it is virtually impossible to stop. Even not practicing is practicing in a way, if you are aware of how you feel compared with when you do practice regularly and how it affects your ability to handle stress and pain.

The way to maintain and nurture mindfulness is to develop a daily momentum in the meditation practice and keep it going.

The way to keep the formal practice alive is to do it! It needs to become a part of your life the way eating and working is. Keeping the practice alive by making time for being, non-doing, no matter how much rearranging it takes. Making a time for formal practice every day is like feeding yourself every day. If you sit with your problems and doubts, they tend to dissolve in subsequent weeks. What seemed murky becomes clear.

Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese meditation teacher, poet, and peace activist, used the image of cloudy apple juice settling in a glass to describe meditation. You just sit the mind settles itself. It is like that.

Instructions on watching the breath. Watch the breath does not mean that we think about it. The practice involves being with your breathing, observing it, feeling it.

Instructions on how to handle thinking. It does not mean that thinking is bad and that you should suppress your thoughts so that you can concentrate on your breathing, or the body scan, or the yoga posture. The way to handle thinking is to just observe it as thinking, to be aware of thoughts as events in the field of awareness.

If you are developing concentration you can go back to your breath. This does not mean pushing away your thoughts or shutting them off, or repressing them, or rejecting them. It is more gentle than that. You are allowing your thoughts to do whatever they do as you keep your attention on the breath as best you can, moment to moment.

Or you can watch your thinking instead of your breath. You bring your attention to the flow of thought itself. We are not oriented toward the content of the thought even though we are aware of the content. We let them register and work at just seeing them as thoughts, observing them come and go without getting pulled into their content. Here we allow acceptance to come in. We do not judge a thought as good and another as bad we just see it as being there and accept it as it is, because it is already there. This is a very gentle practice. In this way we do not compromise our chances of seeing clearly ourselves and our minds as they really are.

So the real practice is not what technique you are using. It is looking deeply within, awareness of your internal state of being. The mind tends to want to think about externals... what we have to do, places to be, people to see. It is your commitment to wise attention, moment to moment, your willingness to see and let go, to see and let be, whatever thoughts preoccupy the mind.

Another pitfall to meditation is to get caught up in thinking that you are getting somewhere with your practice, into special states or good places. Then the mind will get all caught up in that. You can treat this in the same way that you treat thoughts and work with it. To get into talking a great deal about it and your practice... takes you outside. Your practice will grow in depth and maturity and your mind will be less ruled by its own little delusions if you don't tell people that you are doing it and talk about it so much but just do it. JKZ

Lovingkindness Meditation

The practice of Lovingkindness meditation is a beautiful support to other awareness practices. One recites specific words and phrases evoking a boundless warm-hearted feeling. The strength of this feeling is not limited to or by family, religion, or social class. We begin with our self and gradually extend the wish for well-being happiness to all beings. There are different descriptions of the practice.

To practice lovingkindness meditation, sit in a comfortable and relaxed manner. Take two or three deep breaths with slow, long and complete exhalations. Let go of any concerns or preoccupations. For a few minutes, feel or imagine the breath moving through the center of your chest—in the area of your heart.

Lovingkindness is first practiced toward oneself, since we often have difficulty loving others without first loving ourselves. Sitting quietly, mentally repeat, slowly and steadily, the following or similar phrases:

May I be happy. May I be well. May I be safe. May I be peaceful and at ease. While you say these phrases, allow yourself to sink into the intentions they express. Lovingkindness meditation consists primarily of connecting to the intention of wishing ourselves or others happiness.

However, if feelings of warmth, friendliness, or love arise in the body or mind, connect to them, allowing them to grow as you repeat the phrases. As an aid to the meditation, you might hold an image of yourself in your mind's eye. This helps reinforce the intentions expressed in the phrases.

After a period of directing loving-kindness toward yourself, bring to mind a friend or someone in your life who has deeply cared for you. Then slowly repeat phrases of loving-kindness toward them:

May you be happy. you be well. you be safe. you be peaceful and at ease.

As you say these phrases, again sink into their intention or heartfelt meaning. And, if any feelings of lovingkindness arise, connect the feelings with the phrases so that the feelings become stronger as you repeat the words.

As you continue the meditation, you can bring to mind other friends, neighbors, acquaintances, strangers, animals, and finally people with whom you have difficulty. You can either use the same phrases, repeating them again and again, or make up phrases that better represent the lovingkindness you feel toward these beings. In addition to simple and perhaps personal and creative forms of lovingkindness practice, there is a classic and systematic approach to lovingkindness as an intensive meditation practice. This practice is often undertaken during on retreat.

Sometimes during lovingkindness meditation, seemingly opposite feelings such as anger, grief, or sadness arise. Take these to be signs that your heart is softening, revealing what is held there. You can either shift to mindfulness practice or you can-with whatever patience, acceptance, and kindness you can muster for such feelings-direct loving-kindness toward them. Above all, remember that there is no need to judge yourself for having these feelings.

Lovingkindness Phrases

Lovingkindness is often practiced by silently repeating several phrases directed

initially at oneself, and then successively to a benefactor, a friend, a neutral person,

a difficult person and to all beings. Some suggestions [beginning with *May*]:

I be free from enmity.

I be free from hurtfulness.

I be free of troubles of mind and body.

I be able to protect my own happiness.

you be free from enmity.

you be free from hurtfulness.

you be free of troubles of mind and body.

you be able to protect your happiness.

all beings be free from enmity.

all beings be free from hurtfulness.

all beings be free of troubles of mind and body.

all beings be able to protect their happiness.

Often today, different phrases are taught, such as

I/you/all beings be happy.

I/you/all beings be healthy.

I/you/all beings be safe.

I/you/all beings be peaceful.

What's most important is to use phrases that are meaningful to you—and not too complex; simple is better.

These phrases may be more accessible to send to someone you have difficulty with. For example, your least favorite politician or a terrorist. It might be quite difficult to wish that person be happy, healthy & safe. But perhaps you can wish they be free of enmity and hurtfulness. And you certainly can wish that they be free of troubles of mind. After all, then they would not be so difficult. When you understand that the only happiness that can be protected is that which is generated via wise and wholesome actions, you can even wish difficult people have happiness that can be protected.

Class 8

One day you finally knew What you had to do, and began, Though the voices around you Kept shouting Their bad advice, Though the whole house Began to tremble And you felt the old tug At your ankles. "Mend my life!" Each voice cried. But you didn't stop. You knew what you had to do, Though the wind pried With its stiff fingers At the very foundations, Though their melancholy Was terrible. It was already late Enough, and a wild night, And the road full of fallen Branches and stones. But little by little, As you left their voices behind, The stars began to burn Through the sheets of clouds, And there was a new voice, Which you slowly Recognized as your own, That kept you company As you strode deeper and deeper Into the world, Determined to do The only thing you could do, Determined to save The only life you could save.

Mary Oliver



You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf.
JKZ

Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?
Mary Oliver

Reasons Not to Meditate

I'll be honest: I've never liked meditating. I've dabbled in it, and forced myself to sit for 30 day meditation challenges, and it was boring and hard. Plus life is so busy: Five minutes a day is a lot to ask! There are so many types of meditation that just don't jive with me. I don't like the idea of sitting for twelve hours a day (some Vipassana styles), or getting whipped by a bamboo stick if I start to fall asleep (some Buddhist meditations). In classical yoga meditation, the intent seems to be to escape from the horrid reality of having a body into the bliss of nothingness. No thanks. This culture gives me (especially as a woman) enough reasons to try to escape my body. I'm trying to learn how to love it, here.

The truth is, more than anything, I am afraid of sitting still and feeling my feelings. So lately, I'm facing my fears, and trying again. In the practice I'm trying, you lie down, feet on the floor, knees bent and resting against each other. You breathe into your belly and feel. Without the distraction of the knee, hip, and back pain that can arise from sitting upright, deeper emotions can rise up to the surface. You just relax and feel them. I've discovered five great reasons not to ever do this:

1. You'll have to feel your feelings. All that anxiety, anger, shame, and fear you've been trying to suppress (with drinking, eating, Facebook, being "busy") will hit you with its full force. This is not a practice of rainbows and flowers. Ugly, uncomfortable feelings are trying to talk to you, and if you meditate, you give them the chance.
2. You will lose the ability to lie to yourself. If you practice feeling what you feel, your mastery for self-deception will start to fail. It gets harder to convince yourself that this relationship is going to work or that you really do like your job, or that it's okay to keep letting your boss talk down to you. You might even have to do something about it.

3. Your powers of prevarication will weaken. Admitting to yourself what you really feel makes it that much harder to deceive others. You could get incredibly vulnerable, and it will show. You might have to tell someone you love them. Or that you need help. Or cry in public.
4. Your spiritual high horse kick you off. Spirituality is not pretty. It's not about positivity, or who can have the most inspiring Facebook feed. This kind of work is humbling. You'll get a good long look at the mistakes you've made, and all the ridiculous and mundane thoughts that run through your head when you try to be still. You'll realize how much we are all the same in this way.
5. You'll discover that you're not actually all that busy. "Busy" has become a badge of honor in our fast-paced world where our fascinating lives are constantly on display through social media. It's not that everyone else needs you so you have no time for yourself. It's that you don't want to spend time with yourself. Having nothing to do means emotions could arise, and as we've established, that's terrifying. When we make it a practice to stare our lonely hearts down, we don't have any more reason to be afraid. In conclusion, don't meditate. It could change your life.

JC Peters