

# Beating Stress with Mindfulness

Stress is an inevitable part of our lives. We have all experienced it to some degree: during an argument with a partner, while speaking to a large group, while meeting a deadline at work. Our experiences in an increasingly complex world constantly require us to adapt to changes and cope with stressors. Learning how to identify and manage stress can help prevent physical and psychological problems, increase your chances of future success and promote a longer, healthier life.

Mindfulness, which is best described as the practice of being more aware in the present moment, is one of the most effective ways to respond to personal stress. Examples of mindfulness include:

- Becoming aware of breathing, feeling the stomach rise and fall with each breath
- Feeling the various physical sensations an emotion creates, like rising heart rate or sweating
- Paying attention to all of the sounds in a room
- Noticing the body's reaction to stress, like tense muscles or shallow breathing
- Watching the negative thoughts that arise when feeling stress or boredom

It can be difficult to get your mind to slow down, but focusing on the now can help improve your physical, social and mental health. Practicing mindfulness can result in:

- Improved organisational skills
- An increase in self-esteem
- A sense of calmness, relaxation and self-acceptance
- Better quality of sleep
- A decrease in depression
- A decrease in overall anxiety
- A decline in negative emotions
- Fewer conduct and anger-management problems

## Skills of Mindfulness

Mindfulness is made up of a number of skills. Once mastered, they can help provide a richer life experience and control anxiety and worry.

### Awareness

Awareness involves learning how to block out distractions to allow you to focus on one thing at a time. This includes being able to recognise the individual things going on around you—the sights and sounds—as well as the thoughts and feelings inside you.

### Nonjudgmental Observation

This skill forces you to experience life in an objective way as opposed to applying labels such as good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, or valuable or worthless to everything.

### Being in the Present Moment

To achieve this, you must eliminate thoughts about the past (ruminations) and future (worry).

Every moment in time is unique. This skill of mindfulness focuses on experiencing each of these moments as deeply as possible and opening ourselves to new possibilities. It also requires accepting things as they are, as opposed to what we wish they would be.

