

Mindfulness Exercises

1. The Raisin Exercise

This is a great **introductory exercise for beginners** to start practicing mindfulness, since it can be attempted by anyone with any kind of food (although one with an interesting or unusual texture, smell, or taste is best).

In this exercise, the facilitator provides participants with a few raisins and asks that they pretend they have never seen a raisin before. The facilitator then asks that the group pay careful attention to:

- The way the raisin looks
- How it feels
- How their skin responds to its manipulation
- Its smell
- Its taste

Focusing on the single object of the raisin is meant to bring the **participant's mind** to the present, to what is right in front of them.

2. The Body Scan

- **Step 1:** the **Body Scan** begins with the participants lying on their backs with their palms facing up and their feet falling slightly apart. This exercise can also be done sitting on a comfortable chair with feet resting on the floor.
- **Step 2:** the facilitator then asks the participants to **lie very still** for the duration of the exercise, and move with awareness if it becomes necessary to adjust their position.
- **Step 3:** next, the facilitator begins guiding the Body Scan. Participants begin by bringing **awareness to the breath**, noticing the rhythm, the experience of breathing in and expelling out. The facilitator explains that nobody should try to change the way they are breathing but rather just hold gentle awareness on the breath.
- **Step 4:** next, the facilitator guides **attention to the body:** how it feels, the texture of clothing against the skin, the contours of the surface on which the body is resting, the temperature of the body and the environment.
- **Step 5:** the facilitator guides awareness to the parts of the body that are tingling, sore, or feeling particularly heavy or light, s/he asks the participants to note any areas of their body where they don't feel any sensations at all or are hypersensitive.

A typical Body Scan runs through each part of the body, paying special attention to the way each area feels, the scan usually moves as follows:

1. From toes of both feet to
2. The rest of the feet (top, bottom, ankle) then to the
3. Lower legs,
4. Knees,
5. Thighs and
6. Pelvic region- buttocks, tailbone, pelvic bone, genitals. From there moving to
7. The Abdomen, then the
8. Chest,
9. Lower back,
10. Upper back- back ribs & shoulder blades,

11. Hands (fingers, palms, backs, wrists),
12. Arms (lower, elbows, upper),
13. Neck,
14. Face and head (jaw, mouth, nose, cheeks, ears, eyes, forehead, scalp, back&top of head),
15. and finally ending with the blow hole (Fleming & Kocovski, 2007)

After the Body Scan is complete and the participants feel ready to come back to the room they can slowly open their eyes and move naturally to a comfortable sitting position.

3. Mindful Seeing

For some, the absence of visual stimuli can feel stifling. After all, a healthy imagination does not come naturally to everyone. The activity of **Mindful Seeing** may be helpful to anyone who identifies with this feeling.

This is a simple exercise, requiring only a **window** with some kind of a view. The facilitator guides the group following these steps:

- **Step 1:** find a space at a window where there are sights to be seen outside.
- **Step 2:** look at everything there is to see. **Avoid labeling and categorizing** what you see outside the window; instead of thinking “bird” or “stop sign”, try to notice the colors, the patterns, or the textures.
- **Step 3:** pay attention to the movement of the grass or leaves in the breeze; notice the many different shapes present in this small segment of the world you can see. Try to see the world outside the window from the perspective of someone unfamiliar with these sights.
- **Step 4:** be observant, but not critical. Be aware, but not fixated.
- **Step 5:** if you become distracted, gently pull your mind away from those thoughts and notice a color or shape again to put you back in the right frame of mind.

4. Mindful Listening

This last activity is extracted from the **Positive Psychology Toolkit** and introduces **mindful listening** as a group exercise.

Mindful listening is an important skill and can be a great group mindfulness exercise. In general, people thrive when they feel fully “heard” and “seen.” In other words, mindful listening involves a form of self-regulation in which the focus on the self is set aside. Mindful listening can create an inner stillness in both parties as the speaker may feel free of the listener’s preconceptions and prejudices, and the listener is free of inner chatter whilst learning **valuable positive communication skills**.

The **Mindful Listening exercise** involves these steps:

- **Step 1:** invite each participant to think of one thing they are stressed about and one thing they look forward to.
- **Step 2:** once everyone is finished each participant takes their turn in sharing their story with the group,
- **Step 3:** encourage each participant to direct attention to how it feels to speak, how it feels to talk about something stressful as well as how it feel to share something positive.
- **Step 4:** participants are instructed to observe their own thoughts, feelings and **body sensations** both when talking and listening.

- **Step 5:** after each participant has shared, you can break into small groups and answer the questions stated below. Next, you regroup into the whole group and have a discussion and debrief with these questions.

Those questions are:

- 1: How did you feel when speaking during the exercise?
- 2: How did you feel when listening during the exercise?
- 3: Did you notice any mind-wandering?
- 4: If so, what was the distraction?
- 5: What helped you to bring your attention back to the present?
- 6: Did your mind judge while listening to others?
- 7: If so, how did “judging” feel in the body?
- 8: Were there times where you felt empathy?
- 9: If so, how did this feel in the body?
- 10: How did your body feel right before speaking?
- 11: How did your body feel right after speaking?
- 12: What are you feeling right now?
- 13: What would happen if you practiced mindful listening with each person that you spoke with?
- 14: Do you think mindful listening would change the way you interact and relate with others?
- 15: How would it feel if you set the intention to pay attention with curiosity, kindness, and acceptance to everything you said and everything you listened to?

5. Mindful Walking Down The Street Technique

One core process, which can be influenced by mindfulness practice, is our ability to observe our thoughts, emotions, and sensations without reacting to fix them, hide them, or solve them. This awareness creates room for choice between impulse and action, which can help develop coping skills and **positive behavioral change**.

- In the first step of this intervention; the facilitator helps the client visualize a scenario in which they are walking down a familiar street when they look up and see someone they know on the other side of the street. They wave however the other person doesn't respond and continues to walk right past.
- In the second step of the mindful walking exercise the facilitator prompts reflection from the client by asking a series of questions:
 1. As you were imagining, did you notice any of your thoughts?
 2. As you were imagining, did you notice any of your emotions?

“It can be sometimes be challenging to differentiate between thoughts and emotions as they can play off each other quite rapidly”

- In the third and final step of the exercise, the facilitator asks the client to reflect on the series of emotions and thoughts that came up and how this affects their behavior, whether the exercise was helpful and for any final comments.

6. The Three Minute Breathing Space

Unlike meditations or a body scan, this exercise is quick to perform and easy to get started with a mindfulness practice in your busy life or that of your clients. With meditations and the body scan thoughts often pop up and **keeping a quiet and clear head** can be a challenge.

This last exercise of **Three Minute Breathing Space** can be the perfect technique for those with busy lives and minds. The exercise is broken into three sections, one per minute, and works as follows:

1. The first minute is spent on answering the question, “how am I doing right now?”, while focusing on the feelings, thoughts and sensations that arise and trying to give these words and phrases.
2. The second minute is spent on keeping awareness on the breath.
3. The last minute is used for an expansion of attention from solely focusing on the breath, feeling the in’s and out’s and how they affect the rest of the body.

This exercise can be rather challenging for keeping a quiet mind and often thoughts can pop up. The idea is not to block them, but rather just let them come into your mind and then disappear back out again. Try to just observe them.

Resources

[http://www.programsformindfulliving.org/uploads/7/1/8/0/71807795/mindfulness and the elderly.pdf](http://www.programsformindfulliving.org/uploads/7/1/8/0/71807795/mindfulness_and_the_elderly.pdf)

<https://adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/related-illnesses/stress>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4085471/>