

# Access

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## Are you stressed? Practicing mindfulness can help



Newly gained evidence about the negative impact of chronic stress on health has led to widespread research showing that mindfulness practices can play a significant role — **in not only coping with stress, but improving overall health.** Mindful self-care practices have even been used to help treat patients with chronic disease.

### What exactly is ‘mindfulness’?

**Mindfulness can be described as an awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, and being present in the moment in a non-judgmental way.** This means developing an openness to all experiences and an acceptance of all feelings and sensations — *whether good or bad.*

### What are the benefits of practicing mindfulness?

Substantial research has demonstrated how mindful-based interventions can improve both mental and physical health. It has been shown to:

- decrease stress and psychological distress
- enhance mental health and functioning
- Increase emotion regulation and self-control

### Wondering how to start?

Are you wondering how to incorporate mindfulness into your own life? Here are three simple exercises to help incorporate mindfulness in your daily activities:

- **Mindful Eating:** This means spending time actually looking at what we eat, noting the colors, the smells, etc., and taking time to fully enjoy the flavor by eating slowly and deliberately, rather than inhaling the food while we are doing something else.
- **Mindful breathing:** Focus your attention on your breath — the inhale and exhale. Eyes may be open or closed, but it may be easier to maintain your focus if you close your eyes. Simply observe each breath, without trying to adjust it. It may help to focus on the rise and fall of your chest or the sensation through your nostrils. As you do so, you may find that your mind wanders, distracted by thoughts or bodily sensations. That’s OK. Just notice that this is happening and gently bring your attention back to your breath.
- **Present Moment Awareness:** This means being truly present in the moment. Like mindful eating, being present in the moment means being aware of all our senses in our surroundings. What do I see? What do I smell? What am I able to touch and feel? Am I aware of my breathing?

# Why are we so stressed?

Most everyone agrees that we are more stressed today than we were 50 years ago. The top reasons that people today feel stressed are:

1. Job pressures
2. Money problems
3. Health issues
4. Relationship problems
5. Poor nutrition
6. Media/technology overload
7. Sleep deprivation



dear stress,  
let's break up.

## Running on autopilot (*in too many directions at once*)

The impact of all of this stress is that many people are living from “the neck up” — **the mind becomes isolated from the body.** One research study estimated that during 47% our waking hours we are thinking about everything else, *except what we are actually doing.* Mindfulness brings the mind and body together in the same place at the same time.

## How can you begin bringing your mind and body together?

Start with short activities. You can: **S.T.O.P.**

**S**top, pause.

**T**ake a breath and tune in.

**O**bserve what is happening in your body. Calmly acknowledge your thoughts, feelings and sensations.

**P**roceed mindfully. Practice patience and persistence.



## What is the negative impact of living a stress-filled life?

We develop unhealthy coping skills — often resulting in numbing, frenetic lives, coupled with a sedentary lifestyle.

What is the end result? We are becoming the most obese, over-medicated, addicted, and in-debt generation of Americans, **ever.**

## Practicing mindfulness is not an escape from the rough patches of life.

- We can't change everything that happens to us in life, but we can change the way we experience it.
- Mindfulness can teach us a different way to relate and a new way of seeing things. Our circumstances don't change, but our way of seeing them does.

So, try taking a “mindful moment” to help deal with everyday life and its challenges, especially when you are feeling stressed.



## Want to learn more about mindfulness?

### Get an App

- **Insight Timer** (available for iOS and Android)
- **Aura** (available for iOS and Android)
- **Mindfulness** (available for iOS and Android)
- **Stop, Breathe & Think** (available for iOS and Android)
- **Calm** (available for iOS and Android)
- **Mindfulness Bell**

### Read a book

- *Full Catastrophe Living* (Revised Edition): Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness - Jon Kabat Zinn
- *A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook* (A New Harbinger Self-Help Workbook) Paperback - March 1, 2010 - Bob Stahl, Elisha Goldstein

### Check out a Mindfulness website

- <https://msw.usc.edu/mindful-living-resources/>
- <https://www.pocketmindfulness.com/6-mindfulness-exercises-you-can-try-today/>
- <https://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2012/06/09/7-easy-ways-to-be-mindful-every-day/>

**For more information, please call Aurora EAP at 1-800-236-3231.**