

Being Mindful

Tips and strategies to help you
focus, be present, and manage stress



- ▶ Do you often have trouble concentrating?
- ▶ Does your mind frequently wander when you're in class, when you're studying, or even during conversations with friends?
- ▶ Is stress making it difficult for you to stay focused or pay attention?
- ▶ Do you wish you could be more aware and present in class and with others?

If you answered "Yes" to any of the above, you might benefit from learning some mindfulness techniques.

Mindfulness is simply making the effort to notice things that you wouldn't normally pay attention to. When you aren't mindful, you rely only on routine and past experience to dictate how to act in a situation. Basically, you go on auto-pilot, which means you're more distracted and less focused.

Being distracted and unfocused can make succeeding in college difficult and stressful.

This InfoGuide will help you learn some ways to be more mindful, so that you can be a better, more confident student.

Be Present

Being present means turning off auto-pilot and focusing on what you are doing and experiencing *now*.

To be more present in class...

- ▶ Come to class well-rested and alert.
- ▶ Get to class early, sit in the front, and turn off your phone.
- ▶ Leave all of your concerns and problems at the door. (You can pick them back up after class.)
- ▶ Be aware of your thoughts. If your mind starts to wander, notice it, and refocus on the class.
- ▶ Remind yourself that when you learn as much as you can in class, you have less to learn on your own.

Train your brain

Practice “targeting” your attention. For example, when walking your familiar route to class, pay attention to things you don’t normally notice—the sounds you hear, the scenery, the buildings and the people you pass.

Being mindful is something you get better at with practice. Remind yourself to be “in the now” and to be fully present throughout the day—in and out of class, with others, and alone.



Know Yourself

Being mindful isn't just paying attention to what's going on around you. Paying attention to yourself and how you feel is also important.

Improve your attention

Everyone's attention span is limited. This limit varies from person to person and situation to situation. For example, you might be able to do math problems for hours, but struggle to pay attention to your history textbook for longer than a few minutes.

Pay attention to how long you can do something (e.g., work on a paper, read a textbook) before you get the itch to take a break or pull out your phone. Then commit to extending the time you'll work on that subject or project, before you succumb to that "itch."

Know what works (and what doesn't)

Just because you've always done something a certain way doesn't mean it's the best way. For example, even if you've always saved homework and studying for the evening, that doesn't mean it's the most ideal time for you to study.

To determine what works best for you, pay attention to how you feel, and to the results of your efforts.

Are you tired when you study after dinner? Are you distracted when studying in your dorm room? Is the way you study ineffective or boring? If the answer is yes, make a change! Try something different.

Manage Stress



It's difficult to be mindful or present when you're stressed out. And being a college student can definitely be stressful at times.

- ▶ There are a number of ways to manage stress (e.g., relaxation exercises, Tai Chi, deep breathing, Yoga, meditation). Check out your college's Health and Wellness program and Recreation Center for relaxation related programs.
- ▶ When you're feeling stressed, confide in others—friends, family, spiritual leaders, professionals at the Counseling Center. It's much healthier to share your problems and concerns than it is to go it alone.
- ▶ If you are feeling overwhelmed and think you may have taken on too much, make a list of everything that's going on in your life and determine what can be modified, delayed, or dropped.
- ▶ Make sure you have time in your day to relax and rejuvenate. If you don't have time for rest and relaxation, you won't have the energy and stamina needed to perform well in your classes, or to be present and mindful in your daily activities.

Relax and Meditate

Try these mindfulness strategies whenever you have a few extra minutes.

Deep Breathing

Find a comfortable place to sit, close your eyes, and relax your body. Breathe in deeply, and slowly count to four. On four, slowly release your breath. Then repeat. *Deep breathing is incredibly effective in helping you feel calm and relaxed.*

Visualization

Close your eyes and imagine a relaxing scene, adding as many details as you can. Even better, pair your visualization with deep breathing.

Guided Meditation

Meditation enhances relaxation and improves focus, which are key components of mindfulness. With guided meditation, a voice walks you through the meditation process by helping you relax your body and focus your thoughts. Guided meditation is easy to find in online streaming services like **Spotify**, **Google Play**, or **iTunes**. You can also use an app like **Meditation Studio** or **Calm**.

Be positive and open-minded, even if you're skeptical about this mindfulness and meditation stuff. Anything you can do to help your mind adapt to the new demands of college life is worth a try.