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**MINDFULNESS PRACTICES: Starting a Practice—step by step.**

*Your mind is the basis of everything you experience. It is* you *in each moment. So to understand it deeply can be the most important thing you ever learn to do. And there really is only a choice between noticing what is arising in your mind in each moment, and not noticing it. If you train yourself to notice thoughts and emotions as they arise, you can have agency over how you choose to respond.*

*But to not notice what is arising in the mind is to be merely lived by those thoughts and emotions; to be trapped by wherever they take you. And this in turn determines your behavior in the world. And the goals to which you aspire, and the quality of your relationships. Mindfulness and meditation give you the chance to do something that few people do: to study and understand your own mind.*  Sam Harris.

1. Not interested in mindfulness, or it doesn’t seem right for you now?
	1. Keep doing what you have always done. But remember that this tool is always in your toolbox if you want it.
2. A little interested?
	1. Pause to take one deep breath throughout the day. See how the breath feels, and see how your body feels, and notice what you are doing.
	2. A related technique is “[4/7/8](https://www.hgi.org.uk/resources/delve-our-extensive-library/resources-and-techniques/7-11-breathing-how-does-deep) Breathing,” taking a deep breath, pausing briefly, and then really slowing down the exhalation. That triggers the relaxation response and paying attention to the breath in this way can break a cycle of unhelpful thinking.
3. A little more interested?
	1. Take 3 of those deep breaths and notice your body as you do it.
	2. Another version is to use each of the three breaths in a different way:
		1. First breath: bring attention to the simple process of breathing.
		2. Second breath: note tension in the body and try to calm it.
		3. Third breath: think of something that brings you pleasure--a person, pet, place, or anything—and use that feeling to try to bring a little joy into your body. Start small.
	3. It also helps to pause and notice what you are doing and feeling, and whisper that out loud.
4. Even more?
	1. Regularly use the **STOP** practice
		1. **S**top what you are doing.
		2. **T**ake a deep breath.
		3. **O**bserve what is happening in your mind and body and around you, and see if you can meet whatever you find with kindness towards yourself.
		4. **P**roceed with what you are doing. (Perhaps from a slightly wiser place!)
5. Add some meditation?
	1. Use the above practices anytime.
	2. Try doing a meditation for just a minute every day for 30 days and see what happens.
		1. Body scan—pause and check into the parts of your body from the feet to the head.
		2. Breathing meditation—pause and focus on the breath; when you mind wanders, note that and gently bring it back to the breath.
			1. This allows you to practice the skill of gathering your attention and also of noticing thoughts and letting them be without being hooked by them.
			2. You can find one-minute meditations on the internet, but all you really need to do is decide to check into your body or follow your breath.
		3. If you begin to appreciate taking these moments to care for yourself, you can slowly increase the length of the meditations. Experiment. See what works for you.
	3. Try to do one or two activities mindfully—paying attention entirely to the activity. Try not to go on autopilot or let the mind wander. Examples include eating, brushing teeth, showering, cooking, etc.
6. More meditation?
	1. Most classes suggest starting with 5-10 minutes a day. But don’t do this if you are forcing it.
		1. Habits are best formed when you appreciate the results and therefore become more motivated, so if longer meditation is hard, start with just one minute and build up.
	2. The apps listed below all have progressive courses that can guide you with this. Or you can use the free meditations at the UCLA site.
	3. It also helps to read a book to add to understanding and motivation.
	4. You can take a formal class locally or online.
	5. Don’t give up. This isn’t a “technique” that makes you feel good on demand. If you think that, and then something bad happens that overwhelms your practice, you may think that it doesn’t work and quit. This is a life-long practice that becomes more and more powerful over time as you begin to really understand your own mind. Trust in your experience and keep going.
7. Use self-care. Meditation isn’t always for everyone, and if you are going through a particularly difficult time, meditation may actually recycle the pain. Simply stop or seek one-on-one help with a trained expert.

**Local resources**

I teach free classes online. You can contact me at jonwalker22@gmail.com, or visit my website [ModestlyMindful.com](https://www.modestlymindful.com/).

Insight Meditation Fort Wayne-- [insightfw.org/](http://insightfw.org/)

Parkview Center for Healthy Living-- 672-6500 <https://www.parkview.com/well-being/center-for-healthy-living/center-for-healthy-living>

**Books**

*Mindfulness: An Eight-Week Plan* byMark Williams and Danny Penman

*Fully Present: The Science, Art and Practice of Mindfulness* by Diana Winston and Susan Smalley

**Online/apps**

* Both [Headspace](http://www.headspace.com/) and [10% Happier](http://www.10percenthappier.com/) require a paid subscription, but both are very well done.
* If you approach things from an intellectual direction, consider the [Waking Up](https://app.wakingup.com/) app by Sam Harris (paid subscription).
* Insight Timer is a free app with lots of advice and meditations. There is also a paid membership.
* UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center: [http://marc.ucla.edu/](http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22)
	+ There are free guided meditations and excellent fee-based online classes
* A 40-day free course from Jack Kornfield and Tara Brach:
	+ <https://www.soundstrue.com/products/mindfulness-daily#5db32b65e502d>
* Monash University in Melbourne, Australia has a wonderful free online course that even has a moderator for questions: <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/mindfulness-wellbeing-performance>
* There is also a popular free online course at <https://palousemindfulness.com/>