



# Your guide to Meditation and being mindful

We live busy lives with many distractions, interruptions and things that need to be done. You often find yourself doing many things at once and not focusing on one thing. You're so busy 'doing' that you can miss out on 'connecting' with the moments you're living.

And along with all of this is your musculoskeletal condition. It's always there – pain, fatigue, stiffness, appointments, medicines – competing for your time and attention. It's no wonder we all feel a bit overwhelmed at times.

A practice that's being used by many people to manage these stressors, chronic pain, and many health conditions is mindfulness meditation. It's attracted much attention, scientific study and enthusiastic followers in the last several years.

## What is mindfulness meditation?

Simply put, mindfulness meditation focuses your mind on the present moment. It trains your mind to be alert, pay attention to your thoughts and sensations, and accept them without judgement. Being mindful is being aware of the moment.

Mindfulness can be a formal or informal practice.

*Formal mindfulness meditation* is when you commit to putting aside time (the amount of time is up to you) on most days to practise your meditation. During this time, you focus on one thing, such as your breathing, a sound, or the sensations of your body. So if, you're focusing on your breath, you would sit (or lie down) and get comfortable, then focus on your breathing. You notice how it feels, how your chest rises and falls, the sensation of the air as you inhale and how it feels when you exhale.

At times, your mind may wander. That's okay and is very common, especially when you're learning mindfulness. You just need to gently draw your attention back.

*Informal mindfulness* sometimes called everyday mindfulness, is when you bring this attention to everyday situations or activities. For example, when you're going for a walk, you notice how your body feels as it moves. How your feet feel against the ground, how your arms feel as they swing by your side, how the air feels against your skin, and how the sun feels on the top of your head. You notice all of these sensations and focus on how they feel.

Pay the same attention when you're doing other activities throughout your day. For example, when you're washing the car, listening to your children as they tell you about their day, enjoying a meal, or having a warm bath before you go to bed. Focus on the moment, how it feels, and what it means to you.

By doing this, you're focused on 'being' rather than 'doing'.

Again, as with formal mindfulness meditation, your mind and attention may wander. Just bring your focus back to what you're doing. This constant refocusing and returning your attention to the here and now requires time and effort, so regular practice - of formal and informal mindfulness - is essential.

So, what does it have to do with managing your health? And why should you invest time and effort into it when you're already struggling to find time to fit everything in?

### **Mindfulness meditation and health**

Research has shown that regularly practising mindfulness meditation can improve mood, relieve stress, improve sleep, improve mental health and reduce pain. Part of this has to do with the fact that it requires you to become more self-aware and accept experiences and feelings without judgement. This can lead to a greater ability to self-regulate your thoughts, emotions and behaviours, which can help you manage or cope with stressors, chronic pain and health conditions.

Research also shows that regular mindfulness meditation can lead to positive changes in your brain and your genes. To learn more about these changes and other effects mindfulness has on your body, watch this short [Smiling Mind video](#) featuring Associate Professor Dr Craig Hassed from Monash University.

Research is ongoing, and mindfulness is an area of great interest for researchers. As it stands, a large body of research supports the use of mindfulness meditation for all of us. There are no costs (unless you decide to join a class or buy a product), and the risks of practising it are minimal.

### **Getting started**

To practise mindfulness meditation, you can join a class (in person or online), listen to a CD, learn a script from a book or play a DVD or online video. You can also have a taster by doing this simple body scan. It helps you become more aware of your body and how it feels at this moment.

### ***Simple body scan***

- Find a comfortable position. This may be in a chair, on your bed or lying outside in the sun.
- Close your eyes and relax your body.
- Breathe in and out slowly and gently.
- Take your time and focus on smooth, even breaths.
- Notice how your body feels. The weight of it as you sit on the chair or lie down.
- Keep breathing in and out, slowly and evenly.
- Now, focus on your feet. Notice any feelings, sensations, tension, warmth, coolness, pain, or discomfort. Just notice these feelings; they're not good or bad. They simply exist.
- Keep breathing smoothly in and out.
- Move up to your legs. Focus on your legs. Notice any feelings, sensations, tension, warmth, coolness, pain, or discomfort. These feelings are not good or bad. They simply exist at this moment.
- Keep breathing smoothly in and out.
- If your mind starts to wander at any time, that's okay - gently bring your attention back to your breathing...in and out. Then, move back to your body scan.
- Continue scanning your body, noticing each body part as you go and any feelings or sensations you encounter. None of these are good or bad- they're just there.
- Keep breathing smoothly in and out. After you've reached your head and face, take time to notice the feelings and sensations in your whole body. Focus on your breathing, noticing it going in and out. When you're ready, open your eyes.
- Take notice of how you're feeling at this moment.

Practise mindfulness meditation regularly. When you're trying to sleep, after a busy or stressful day, at your desk before a meeting, or out for a walk. Notice how you feel and the things around you, use all of your senses, be present and pay attention to the moment.

### **Q. Where can I get more help?**

**A.** Many people and support organisations can help you manage your musculoskeletal condition. They include:

- your doctor
- Musculoskeletal Australia | [msk.org.au](https://msk.org.au) | National Arthritis and Back Pain+ Help Line: 1800 263 265

### **Q. How can Musculoskeletal Australia help?**

**A.** Our nurses are available for you to speak with about arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions, pain or any other musculoskeletal issues you have. You can contact them on weekdays between 9am-5pm. Phone 1800 263 265 or email [helpline@msk.org.au](mailto:helpline@msk.org.au). We also have a range of services – including free webinars – you can access on our [website](#).

### **More to explore**

- [Mindfulness and pain](#)  
painHEALTH
- [Mindfulness](#)  
Healthdirect
- [Mindfulness](#)  
The Greater Good Science Center, University of California, Berkeley
- [Mindfulness, meditation and self-compassion: a clinical psychologist explains how these science-backed practices can improve mental health](#)  
The Conversation
- [Smiling mind](#)

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