



**Pillars Community Health**

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## Mindfulness 101

“Mindfulness” is a way of thinking that incorporates the mind-body connection. Mindful thinking includes being present and observing your body, thoughts, feelings, actions, and environment around you. It can also be considered a non-judgmental state of mind—meaning you observe these thoughts, feelings, actions, and your environment without judging or criticizing yourself or your circumstances. Instead, you just let it be.<sup>1</sup>

Studies have found that the use of skills to increase mindfulness may have numerous benefits on improving physical and behavioral health,<sup>2</sup> including:

- Reduced stress and tension
- Improved working memory
- Increased focus
- Increased satisfaction in relationships
- Improved immune system function

There are many different exercises you can do to strengthen your mindfulness muscles. Many of these exercises can be practiced anytime, anywhere, and can offer relief from overwhelming thoughts and emotions. Following are a few you can try.

### **Five Senses**

This skill not only helps you practice using mindfulness, but also serves as a grounding tool to cope with difficult or overwhelming emotions. A “grounding tool” is a coping exercise you can use to bring yourself into the present moment; for many people, this may help with soothing difficult thoughts and feelings. To do this, take in your present surroundings and observe:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can hear
- 3 things you can touch/feel
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

After completing this exercise, take a moment to notice your own thoughts, emotions, and body sensations in the present moment, and how they differ from how you were feeling before doing the exercise. Many people report feeling more relaxed, or have decreased emotional intensity, after completing the five senses technique.



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## Mindful Focus

Observe an object in your current surroundings. First, without touching the object, observe what the object looks like: Is it big or small? Is the surface shiny, dull? Does it look textured in any way? Is it soft or hard? Notice the different colors of the object. What else is unique?

If the object is something you are able to touch, hold it or reach out and touch it, and notice some of the following things: What is the texture of the object? Is it smooth or rough? Does it feel soft or hard? Can you bend it, or is it rigid? Are there different areas of the object that feel different in any way? Does it feel hot or cold? Is it heavy or light to hold? What else do you notice about the way it feels?

Mindful focus is an excellent tool to practice when you are walking or exercising. As you walk or complete your exercise routine, notice the things you come in contact with, and the equipment you may use while exercising, such as a ball or weight. Additionally, using mindfulness skills like mindful focus, or mindful breathing, while engaging in physical activity can enhance the mind body connection and promote greater overall wellness.

## Mindful Breathing

1. To start, find a comfortable place to sit or lie down, preferably somewhere quiet. Close your eyes if you feel comfortable doing so, and take a few long, slow breaths.
2. Slowly breathe in through your nose and place one hand on your stomach. Notice how your stomach rises as you breathe in, and the sensation of air moving in through your nostrils. Take a moment to notice any other body sensations you may be experiencing in the moment.
3. Exhale through your mouth. Observe the feeling of your breath moving out of your mouth, across your lips. Notice how your stomach deflates as you exhale and observe any sensations your body may be experiencing.
4. Repeat as many breaths as you need. Notice the weight of your body resting on whatever you're sitting on. With each deep breath, notice the areas of your body that may be holding tension, and how these areas relax. Shift your focus from your breath, to the different areas of your body, and then shift your attention back to your breath.

## References:

1. McKay, Wood, & Brantley. (2007). *The Dialectical Behavioral Therapy Skills Workbook*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc: Oakland, CA.
2. American Psychological Association. (2012). "What Are the Benefits of Mindfulness?" Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/07-08/ce-corner>

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