

Mindfulness

What is mindfulness?

The practice of mindfulness involves directing your attention to and maintaining an awareness of the present moment. In simple terms, mindfulness is paying attention to how you feel, what you are thinking, your environment and what is happening in the moment. Mindfulness is being aware of your feelings and thoughts without passing judgement or exerting pressure to have different emotions or thoughts.

Mindfulness myths

Some myths of mindfulness come from the idea that in order to be successful with mindfulness it requires years of training or a commitment to a spiritual practice. This is not the case.

Mindfulness can be practiced by anyone, anywhere and at any time, taking as little as five minutes to complete.

Mindfulness is not ignoring what's happening around you. It is not running away from reality. It is not thinking only of positive thoughts. Instead it is tuning into your current physical, emotional and mental state. It is recognizing what is going on in the moment. It is learning how to approach and re-examine thoughts you may find difficult.

Benefits of mindfulness

Practicing mindfulness has been linked to positive health and personal benefits. It can help you:

- Manage your emotions and reduce symptoms of anxiety and low mood
- Develop new pathways in the brain and new ways of thinking
- Recharge so you can cope with the stresses of day to day life
- Build up your mental and emotional strength and develop resilience

Our patients who practice mindfulness say it has helped them with:

- Decreased headaches
- Reduced anxiety
- Improved sleep
- Managing stress
- Increased energy levels
- Pacing and planning

How to incorporate mindfulness into daily life

Practicing mindfulness also ties into how you pace and plan your recovery. It's an activity to include in your daily routine and a way to rest and reset your brain. Taking 10 minutes to intentionally be mindful is considered good exercise to help your brain in its' recovery process.

A good time to practice mindfulness is in transitional parts of the day, such as between medical appointments, between meetings, before your kids come home etc. You can use it anywhere – at home, in a parking lot, in a waiting room, literally anywhere.

Mindfulness exercise- 4:7:8 Breath

To assist you with developing the practice of mindfulness, it is important to focus on your breathing. This will allow your thoughts and feelings to come and go without getting caught up in them. The exercise below is a breathing exercise called the 4-7-8 Breathing Technique developed by Dr. Andrew Weil. During this exercise, always inhale quietly through your nose and exhale loudly through your mouth. Breathing out should take twice as long as breathing in.

1. Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge behind and above your front teeth (at the roof of your mouth) and keep it there during the whole exercise.
2. Keeping your tongue in place, exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
3. Close your mouth and breathe in deeply and quietly through the nose to a silent count of 4.
4. Hold your breath for a count of 7
5. Exhale out loudly through your mouth to a count of 8.
6. Repeat for a total of four breaths

Remember, practicing mindfulness exercises your brain and develops skills and resilience to recover from your brain injury/concussion.