



# Mindful Moments with Megan

By: Megan Hays, Ph.D., ABPP

As a psychologist who works with clients to improve their wellbeing, mindfulness is one of my favorite topics. Research suggests numerous benefits for those who practice mindfulness regularly, including improved stress management, sharpened cognitive abilities, reduced anxiety and depression symptoms, and even decreased pain. But despite its ever-growing evidence base, mindfulness can still be a tough sell to my clients. Mindfulness can seem mysterious, strange, and intimidating to those who are new to the concept. A number of myths about mindfulness avail, but contrary to popular belief, it doesn't have to involve chanting, religion, sage burning, or a trip to Asia.

**One of the most common hesitations I hear about mindfulness is that people don't have enough time to practice it.** For most of us, the idea of setting aside 15-30 minutes a day to meditate sounds more like a burdensome chore than a helpful addition to our wellbeing. The good news is that mindfulness is just a concept, and not a particular exercise, meditation, or app. Mindfulness can be incredibly practical when we drill down to its core components: awareness and acceptance. Mindfulness is simply the act of doing an activity with your full attention and awareness (i.e., be right here, right now) while accepting the thoughts and feelings that come and go while performing said activity. Wandering thoughts and distractions are a guaranteed part of practicing mindfulness, so the key is to observe these distractions without judgment. This means that thoughts like "I'm terrible at this mindfulness thing" should be noted, but allowed to continue on their merry way, much like a cloud passing through the sky.

The beauty of mindfulness is that you can practice doing nearly any activity mindfully, which means you don't have to set aside large chunks of time in your day to benefit from this practice. In fact, you can practice mindfulness by "piggybacking" off of your regular daily activities and incorporating "mindful moments" into the day. This concept is also referred to as "microdosing" mindfulness. For those wanting to try incorporating mindful moments to improve wellbeing, check out the **10 mini-mindfulness ideas** below:

**1) Fire Up Your Five Senses:** Bring attention to the present using your five senses. In the now, what is one thing you can see around you? What is one thing you can hear? What is one thing you can smell? What is one thing you can feel? What is one thing you can taste?

**2) Mindful Eating:** Choose one daily meal or snack to practice eating mindfully. This means leaving your phone in a different room and turning off the TV. Notice how everything tastes and smells. Feel the texture and temperature of the food. Observe the steam or condensation from your cup. When your mind inevitably wanders or you feel the urge to reach for your phone, take note of your wandering attention and gently refocus on your meal. Repeat this self-redirection as many times as necessary!

**3) Mindful Movement:** Most of us already spend some portion of our day moving, whether it's walking down the halls at work or squeezing in a workout at the gym. Incorporate mindfulness into these movements. Place as much attention as you can on the movements of your body, your breathing, and your surroundings. Be intention and focus on the feelings. Observe any sensations, such as an achy knee, without judgment.

**4) Doorknob Technique:** Any time you encounter a doorknob or handle, resist the urge to enter the room immediately. Pause for 3 seconds while touching the door handle and take a full inhale and exhale. Take these few seconds to focus on the present, and resist the urge to focus on all that has happened before and all that is ahead of you for the day.

**5) Find Your Feet:** Simply notice the position of your feet on the floor, the balance of the weight, any sensations between your feet or around your feet. You can do this exercise seated or standing.

**6) Floating Feelings:** Spend a minute or two observing your thoughts and feelings come and go as if they are clouds in the sky or leaves on a river. For example, you might acknowledge to yourself, "I am noticing anxiety," without attempting to push away or "fix" that feeling. Simply focusing your awareness and labeling your thoughts and emotions without judgment can be a powerful mindfulness practice.

**7) Turn Off Your Autopilot:** We all have several things we do each day that have become so habitual that we barely notice them. Some examples might be brushing your teeth, driving to work, or washing the dishes. Integrate mindfulness into these tasks by experiencing them as if it was for the first time. For example, consider taking a different route to work and taking in all of the surroundings. Or activate all 5 senses during your daily shower instead of mentally preparing your to-do list.

**8) Mindful Breathing:** At least once a daily, take a couple of minutes to simply breathe and pay attention to your breath without judgment. That's it! Notice how the breath feels in your nose and chest as you inhale and exhale.

**9) Appreciation:** At the end of the day, list 3 things that you appreciate. This can be objects, people, or even events that went well.

**10) Minute Before Meeting:** Pause before you begin each meeting and take 1-minute to focus attention on your breath or one minute to stretch your body. This will allow your body to settle and your mind to focus. Consider doing it as a group activity at the start of each meeting!