



# Practice Mindfulness to Boost Well-Being & Performance

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**M**editation has become enormously popular, and with good reason: it's great for you. Research shows that meditation can reduce stress and anxiety [1], increase resilience and well-being [2], develop emotional intelligence [3], boost focus [4], enhance cognitive flexibility [5], and improve physical health [6].

## MEDITATION: WHY & HOW

Here's one way to understand meditation: **It is the practice of learning to stay in the present moment and out of our heads.** We spend so much time wrapped up in worries, fears, plans, and memories. When we untangle ourselves from those mental stories and rest in the present moment, we discover a refreshing calm and simplicity. The simple, present-moment awareness we cultivate through meditation has a name you may have heard before: mindfulness.

Here's a simple, powerful meditation technique you can try (a [video version available here](#)):

**1. Sit down:** Find a comfortable seated posture that lets you maintain a straight, unsupported spine. The simplest way is to sit in a chair, with both feet on the floor and your hands on your thighs. For detailed

instructions on meditation posture, see [this video](#).

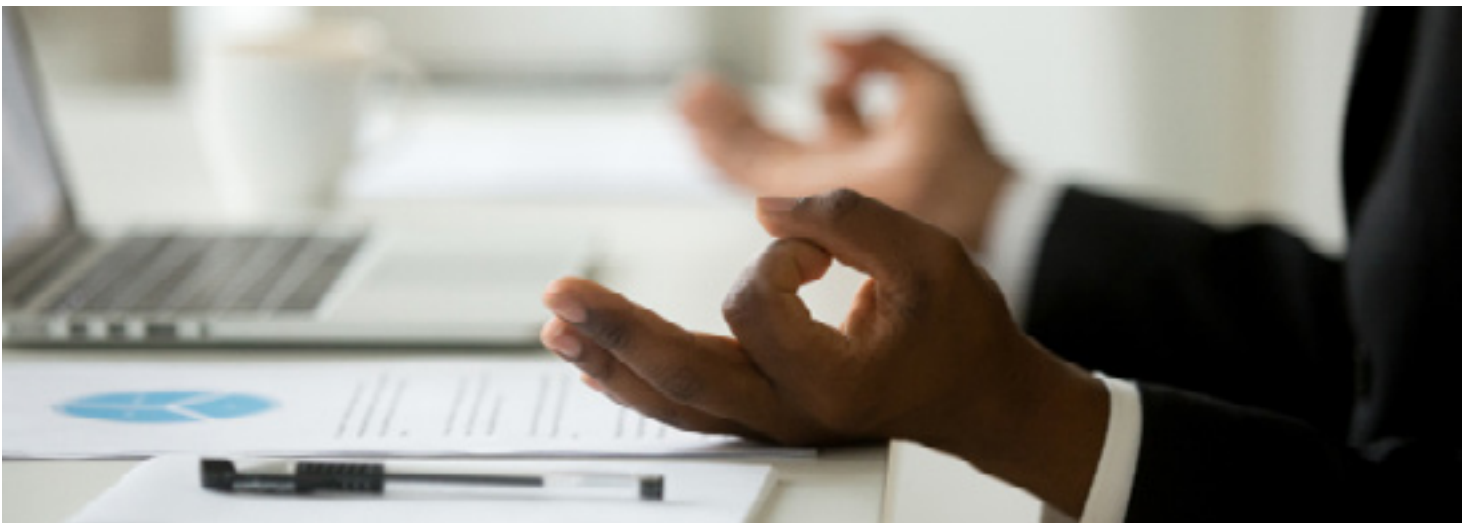
**2. Find your anchor:** Bring your attention to the sensation of air passing through your nostrils as you breathe. That sensation will help anchor you in the present moment.

**3. Rest attention on the anchor:** Rest your attention on the breath at the nostrils. Form the gentle intention simply to observe the flow of sensation at that spot. As you do this, there's no need to deliberately control your breath. If the rhythm of your breath changes on its own, that's fine.

**4. When the attention wanders, notice that and return:** Eventually, you'll get distracted. Not only is that okay, it's supposed to happen. Just notice that the attention has wandered and then gently escort it back to the breath at the nostrils — back to the present.

Some final thoughts on meditation:

Meditation is often soothing and enjoyable... but not always. Like most things worth doing, meditation will sometimes challenge you. It can be agitating or uncomfortable on occasion. It can even stir up





difficult thoughts, emotions, or memories. These experiences are a normal part of the process and are actually useful learning opportunities. I hope you'll embrace the challenge and growth it brings.

One last tip: **Meditating regularly is more important than sitting for a long time.** Even a few minutes a day can bring real benefits. The Tibetan meditation masters say, "Short sessions, many times."

## MINDFULNESS & ANXIETY

Anxiety isn't fun, but it's totally normal — everyone experiences it. Luckily, there are simple ways to work with anxiety so that it's less of a problem. To use these strategies effectively, it's helpful first to understand how anxiety arises and grows.

The root of anxiety is avoidance. We feed anxiety whenever we avoid uncomfortable feelings, thoughts, and situations [7]. Because anxiety is itself uncomfortable, we avoid it when it appears, which makes the anxiety worse, which triggers more avoidance, and so on. It's a vicious circle.

However, there's good news: avoidance is a reflex we can unlearn. Through mindfulness practice, we can experience discomfort without fighting or flinching away. In doing so, we deprive anxiety of its fuel source.

Here are some mindfulness practices that can help when you're feeling anxious:

### THE MINDFUL PAUSE

This technique takes about 30 seconds. You can do it sitting, standing, or lying down. Your eyes can be open or closed. The practice is quick and discreet, so you can do it almost anywhere. It has four steps:

[\(Video version available here.\)](#)

#### 1. Take a deep breath.

Take a slow inhale and exhale. Fill your lungs all the way, but really take your time doing it.

#### 2. Turn toward your body.

Turn your attention toward the sensations in your body. Whatever comes up, just notice it: warmth, pressure, itching, tickling, aching, etc. There's no need to evaluate the sensations as "good" or "bad." Itching is just itching. Coolness is just coolness.

If you notice sensations that seem related to anxiety, those are particularly good to turn toward. You're developing the skill of observing those sensations without resisting, condemning, or judging them.

This step can be as quick as one in-breath or out-breath.

#### 3. Rest your attention on your breath.

Pay attention to the sensation of air passing through your nostrils as you breathe. This is the same technique as the meditation practice we explored earlier.

Just like the previous step, this step needn't take longer than one in-breath or one out-breath.

#### 4. Carry on with your life!

The last step of the mindful pause is simply to re-engage with the world, without hurry. Don't lunge for your phone or speed off to your next activity. Move at a leisurely pace.

### FLOATING NOTING

Like the Mindful Pause, floating noting works by helping you turn toward your present-moment experience instead of avoiding it. However, it's a bit more comprehensive and less bite-sized. Once again, you don't need to adopt a special posture or even find a quiet place. Here's how you do it:

[\(Video version available here.\)](#)

- **Let your attention float freely.** As your attention drifts, various sights, sounds, sensations, and thoughts may grab your attention and take center stage in your awareness.



- As this happens, just **(1) notice whatever stands out in awareness and (2) give it a light mental label.**
- **To keep the labeling simple, we'll use categories:** “seeing” for sights, “hearing” for sounds, “feeling” for physical sensations, and “thinking” for anything that arises in the mind.
- **As new objects arise in awareness, just continue noting whatever is most prominent.**

Let's say the sound of a passing car draws your attention. You just label the experience “hearing.” Then a thought arises — maybe something about a client matter you're working on. Instead of getting caught up in the thought, you label it “thinking.” The thought then triggers a hollow sensation in your stomach, which you label “feeling.”

Even difficult experiences become less overwhelming when you break them down in this way. An anxious sensation or a worried thought is less of a problem when you just notice it, label it, and move on.

Here are a few practice tips:

- Find a nice, steady rhythm for your noting. Personally, I find that noting once every couple of seconds feels good. I advise against noting more quickly than that. Fast noting can produce unpleasant side effects and is best done under a teacher's supervision.
- If you're somewhere private, you can note out loud. It helps you stay focused and present. It can even bring you into a pleasant sort of “flow state.”
- If the same object stands out in your awareness for a while, just keep noting it: “hearing... hearing... hearing...”
- If multiple objects stand out at once, and you don't know which one to label, just pick one.
- If you have no idea what to label in a given moment, you can just notice that uncertainty and label it “don't know.”



## REFERENCES

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## RESOURCES

*Contributed by Anne Brafford*

### Book Recommendations

- Jeena Cho & Karen Gifford: *The Anxious Lawyer: An 8-Week Guide to a Happier, Saner Law Practice Using Meditation*
- Rick Hanson, *Buddha's Brain*
- Daniel Goleman & Richard Davidson, *Altered Traits: Science Reveals How Meditation Changes Your Mind, Brain, & Body*
- Cal Newport: *Deep Work*

### Videos

- Andy Puddicombe, **All It Takes Is 10 Mindful Minutes** ([www.TED.com](http://www.TED.com))

### Web Resources

- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is a well-established, meditation-based stress management program developed by Prof. Jon Kabat Zinn. MBSR resources are widely-available and some can be found [here](#).

### Smart Phone Apps

- **Headspace**: Among the most popular meditation apps.
- **10% Happier: Meditation for Fidgety Skeptics**. A popular meditation app.