

The 20-Day Mindfulness Challenge

Starting today, you will begin your 20-day journey to building a calming mindfulness practice that will help you deal with conflict, stress, and decision making.

The **goal** is to steadily improve your breathing and awareness so you are better equipped to deal with conflict. In the end, this program may help you build stronger relationships with your team-members and bosses.

It's important to note that twenty days isn't enough to build habits that will change your behavior. Building new habits takes repetition, and deliberate practice. However, by consciously implementing some of these skills, you can achieve significant progress in your journey to becoming a better co-worker, parent, or friend. As best said by James Clear in his book *Atomic Habits*, "Every action you take is a vote for the type of person you wish to become."

What is mindfulness?

In brief, mindfulness is:

- Paying full conscious attention to whatever thoughts, feelings, and emotions are flowing through your mind without harsh judgment or criticism¹
- Being fully aware of what is happening in the present moment and not being trapped in the past or worrying about the future
- Living *in* the moment, not *for* the moment

“Mindfulness is a pause – the space between stimulus and response: that’s where choice lies.” -Tara Brach

¹ Penman. *Mindfulness for a More Creative Life*. Piatkus, 2021

How can mindfulness help me?

Thousands of peer-reviewed studies prove the many benefits mindfulness practices produce. Here's the evidence:

- Mindfulness enhances decision making.²
- Meditation enhances brain function. It increases gray matter in areas associated with self-awareness, empathy, self-control, and attention.³
- Mindfulness is a potent antidote to anxiety, stress, depression, exhaustion, and irritability.⁴ In short, regular meditators are happier and more contented, while being far less likely to suffer from psychological distress.⁵
- Mindfulness is at least as good as drugs or counseling for the treatment of clinical level depression. One structured program known as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) is now one of the preferred treatments recommended by the UK's National Institute for Health and Care Excellence.⁶
- Mindfulness protects against the emotionally stressful effects of relationship conflict⁷, and predicts relationship satisfaction.

Here's How It Works

What follows are 20 pages, each page includes **one 5 to 10 minute exercise**. You will **complete one mindfulness activity per work day**, 5 days of the week. Simply read the exercise and try your best to complete it! Once completed, be sure to track your progress on the attached calendar. When you complete your mindfulness exercise, give yourself a check mark for the day! If not completed, leave the space blank.

This program is broken down into 4 weeks, and each week will have a different focus. However, the daily format will never change. The order of activities will always follow this pattern: 1. Guided Exercise, 2. Written Reflection, 3. Quote Recitation.

² Colzato, 'Meditate to create: the impact of focused-attention and open-monitoring training on convergent and divergent thinking,' *Frontiers in Psychology*

³ Hafenbrack, 'Debiasing the mind through meditation: mindfulness and sunk-cost bias,' *Psychological Science*

⁴ Lazar, 'Meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness,' *Neuroreport*

⁵ Ivanowski, 'The psychological and neurophysical concomitants of mindfulness forms of meditation,' *Acta Neuropsychiatrica*

⁶ Ma, Teasdale 'Mindfulness based cognitive therapy for depression' *Journal for Consulting and Clinical Psychology*

⁷ Barnes, 'The role of mindfulness in romantic relationship satisfaction and responses to relationship stress,' *National Library of Medicine*

Let's break down the structure of this daily program:

1. **Guided Exercises:** Every day will start with a guided exercise—an opportunity to learn a new meditation, practice awareness, and bring intentionality into your day.
2. **Written Reflections:** Following your guided exercise, you will be asked to write about your mental state. Prompts will be provided to spark your emotional expression.
3. **Quote Recitation:** Finally, your mindfulness day will end by simply reading aloud the quote at the bottom of the page. This way, you are motivated to move forward with your mindfulness practice.

The Proof

Below, is research supporting these specific strategies:

- 153 adults who used a mindfulness meditation app for 2 weeks experienced reduced feelings of loneliness and increased social contact compared with those in a control group.⁸
- 50 college students showed that practicing meditation 3 times per week improved positive emotions, interpersonal interactions, and understanding of others after 4 weeks.⁹
- A 2018 study involving 70 adults with elevated anxiety found that online journaling for 12 weeks significantly reduced their mental distress. Long-term journaling was also associated with greater resilience.¹⁰
- Research has shown that talking to yourself out loud can motivate you to move forward with your goals, help you focus on a task at hand, and combat self-criticism.¹¹

⁸Lindsay, 'Mindfulness training reduces loneliness and increases social contact in a randomized controlled trial,' *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*

⁹He, 'The interventional effects of loving-kindness meditation on positive emotions and interpersonal interactions,' *National Library of Medicine*

¹⁰Smyth, 'Online Positive Affect Journaling in the Improvement of Mental Distress and Well-Being in General Medical Patients With Elevated Anxiety Symptoms: A Preliminary Randomized Controlled Trial,' *National Library of Medicine*

¹¹Boroujeni, 'The Effect of Instructional and Motivational Self-Talk on Performance of Basketball's Motor Skill,' *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*

Helpful Tips

1. It may be best to complete your mindfulness activity in the morning. This way, you feel its effects throughout your entire workday.
2. You have complete control over when you complete your mindfulness exercise. However, it's recommended that you take a mindfulness break when you're feeling stressed, and need time to relax.
3. Mindfulness can be practiced anywhere, but it can help to identify a quiet space with fewer distractions.
4. You can set an alarm to remind you to complete your mindfulness activity. This way, you can schedule a 5-10 minute block into your busy days.
5. Remember, this packet is for your personal use only.
6. Be patient with yourself. Don't be discouraged by a lack of motivation. That is normal when trying to make a new habit.

Have an open mind when completing the 20-day challenge! Otherwise, it will be easy for you to dismiss some of these exercises as meaningless or dumb. Be different this next month. Make a commitment to yourself to embrace something new wholeheartedly. You may even end up adopting some of these exercises into your everyday life!

Remember:

“Mindfulness won't ensure you'll win an argument.Mindfulness won't enable you to bypass your feelings of anger or hurt either. But it may help you see conflict in a new way, one that allows you to break through old patterns.”

-Sharon Salzberg

Have an Excellent 20 Days!