



Practicing Mindfulness

We have already talked about how to challenge negative beliefs or thoughts.

But sometimes simply challenging bad thoughts may not be enough. Have you ever experienced a situation where your thoughts are so persistent and overwhelming, that you cannot think of anything else? This is called *preoccupation* and it's a sign that you might need to make a change.

The problem with preoccupation is that it leads to anticipation. For example, when was the last time that you were so overwhelmed by thoughts that you wanted to, or needed to take that substance that you actually started to physically react, with urges or cravings? This occurs sometimes, and is called *anticipation* and it's where your body is preparing itself for you to use. The preoccupation/anticipation cycle is common in drug dependence, and it can be really tricky to break.

Fortunately, there are ways that you can break the preoccupation/anticipation cycle. Practicing mindfulness is a really useful and effective way can help you deal with preoccupying thoughts and overcome strong urges or cravings.

Ok, so what is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the practice of being present in the moment, noticing your thoughts and feelings, and letting them go. Mindfulness-based interventions have been shown to help reduce the impact of cravings for people with substance use disorders.

How does it work?

The aim of Mindfulness is *not to avoid negative thoughts*; that would be impossible. The aim is to be unaffected by them. Mindfulness works when you allow your negative thoughts and urges to come, and pay attention to them, but **DO NOT JUDGE**. Instead, try to relax, and see them for what they are: only thoughts.

How can mindfulness help me?

Mindfulness works to reduce the emotional impact that your thoughts can have on you. It won't eliminate negative thoughts altogether, but it can help to empower you to avoid acting on them.

Being aware of your cravings, but at the same time being able to control your state of arousal can greatly reduce your chances of relapse.

Ok, how often should I practice mindfulness?

Just as with everything else in life, the more you practice mindfulness, the easier and more powerful it becomes. To start with, try practicing mindfulness every day for 10-15 minutes – even when you're not experiencing negative thoughts. Now is as perfect a time as any to practice! And remember, every skill you learn improves the more you practice.

Ok, so how do I do it?

Mindfulness is really easy to do. Try these 5 easy steps.

1. Prepare

The first thing to do, is to take a break from whatever it is that you are doing right now. Set aside 10 minutes. If you can, find yourself a quiet space and bring a pen for you to write with.

2. Breathe

Focus on taking 5 breaths, deep and slow. Breathe in through your nose and push your stomach out at the same time. This will bring air deep into your lungs. Then count to 8 as you slowly release the air through your mouth. Focus on squeezing the air out with your diaphragm.

3. Observe

Take the time to observe 5 objects around you. What colours and shapes do you see? Write them down.

4. Feel

Now, notice 5 body sensations. Can you feel your clothes touching your skin? Can you feel your feet connected firmly with the floor?

5. Hear

The final step is to hear what is happening around you. Can you listen out for 5 sounds? What do you hear? Can you hear the cars as they drive past your window? Can you hear the birds sing in the trees?

Ok, that feels good!

So you have successfully practiced mindfulness for the first time. Well done! Now try to aim to incorporate mindfulness into your daily routine, by linking your practice to something you routinely do. For example, just before or after your breakfast; just before you take your morning shower; immediately after you have cleaned your teeth; the first thing you do after you turn off your bedroom light.

If you connect to routine things that you do, it too will become a routine part of your day. Remember, if you practice first thing in the morning, you can prepare your mind for a productive day. If you practice at night before you go to bed, you can induce a state of calm that will help you get a more productive sleep.

Now that you have learned how to practice mindfulness, here are some related sheets that you might also find useful:

[How to cope with cravings](#)

[How to challenge unhelpful thoughts](#)

[How to be assertive](#)

[How to identify high-risk situations](#)

[How to handle high-risk situations](#)

[How to prepare for and respond to a slip](#)

[How to manage a slip](#)