



## The Mindful Check-In

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Mindfulness is simply a way of tuning into yourself and how you are in the present moment. It is helpful as a formal practice in which you actually train yourself to tune in to yourself and the environment in a particular way. You do this by tuning into your breath and your senses in an open curious and non judgemental way. This includes sound, sight, smell and feelings on the skin and inside the body.

We can learn to this fairly quickly over a few breaths using the Mindful Check-In which is demonstrated in the [soundtrack](#) available at [mindfulness.org.au](http://mindfulness.org.au). You can also apply the same technique in your day to day life. It then allows you to become present and oriented to your current situation quite quickly.



This in turn allows you to deal with that situation more skilfully and appropriately. This specific process of becoming present is particularly useful in three ways:

1. enhancing positive experiences
2. helping you to manage difficult experiences and
3. helping you to manage transitions

### ***Enhancing Positive Experiences***

Positive experiences can be simple things such as walking in the park or viewing a beautiful sunset. If you imagine you're walking in a park on a beautiful spring day

.....but you're thinking about your tax return

.....and you hardly notice a thing.

You're walking through the park mindlessly .....on automatic pilot.

However, if you're able to let the tax return go and become mindfully present, you can become open to a whole array of pleasant experiences. You can feel the gentle warmth of the sun on your skin, along with the gentle caress of a slight breeze. You may notice your breathing become increasingly relaxed. You may hear the sounds of bird's singing and of children playing. You can feel the sensation of the ground under your feet as you walk. You begin to notice the colours of the flowers and the insects flying in amongst them and you smell the beautiful scent of those flowers.





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As you become more mindful, you're more likely to notice all of these things and then your experience becomes much richer and more enjoyable. That is the type of pleasant experience which can be experienced more fully through the practice of mindfulness. Actually we are having pleasant experiences all the time .....which we don't notice! We become so used to them that they go under the radar..... So we miss out. We can even eat a whole meal without actually tasting or enjoying the food.

As an antidote to this, we can deliberately come back to our breath and back to our senses .....and enjoy the flavour of the food.

You could even have an experience of a simple mindful process right now as you read this if you want. You could gently caress the back of your left hand with the fingertips of your right hand.



And as you do that...

You might notice that there is something quite pleasurable about this very simple experience.

This sort of simple pleasurable experience is going on under the radar, all of the time. So when we practice any form of mindfulness we can open up to these experiences again.

This is why some mindfulness teachers talk about "beginner's mind". With this mind, we can engage with our experiences as if it's the first time. In fact, as we do this practice we start to notice that every experience really is occurring for the first time because every experience has its own special fingerprint. It is always unique, always new. In this way we can reacquaint ourselves with the joy of discovery that we all had as children.

Attributable to [mindfulness.org.au](http://mindfulness.org.au)



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## MANAGING DIFFICULT AND UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCES

Now let us move on to how Mindfulness can also be helpful with difficult and unpleasant experiences. These are situations such as being stuck in a traffic jam, being trapped in a difficult meeting which we feel is a waste of our time or if finding ourselves in a difficult situation where someone is talking at us in a disrespectful way. In these types of situations it is easy to become very frustrated and to make our situation worse, by running negative stories in our heads.

In the traffic jam, when the car is stationary, it is safe to withdraw our attention from the car in front was a little and to focus more on the breath. And as you do that you might notice that you're gripping the steering wheel with a vice like grip and you might also notice that your are driving yourself crazy with your thoughts.

Focusing on your breath allows you to step back from that and then you might find that your grip spontaneously relaxes. Then it might spontaneously occur to you "My God I could pull over and ring up this person and tell them I'm running late and then I could relax for the rest of the trip."

So the mindfulness allows you to step back, to step off automatic pilot, to become more flexible and more creative and to come up with a solution to the problem. Even if the solution is simply be a matter of adopting a slightly different attitude without doing anything obviously different. For example, in the boring meeting you may just decide to yourself: "okay I'm just going to be mindful and use this meeting as an opportunity to practice mindfulness and just be present and therefore it won't be a waste of time." That meeting then becomes a much less frustrating experience.

## MANAGING TRANSITIONS

Finally let's consider how the Mindful Check-In can help us to manage transitions. Every day is full of transitions from one moment to the next and we have to be able to leave behind what happened in the previous situation to be able to embrace the new situation. When we make transitions the world demands that we make adjustments. We are called upon to behave differently and to engage different skills. That isn't always so easy

The most obvious transitions we all make every day are the transitions of waking up in the morning and going to sleep at night. We all have some degree of difficulty with those transitions.

Another common transition is leaving home and going to work or school and coming home again. There's many more small transitions in every day and each of these transitions demands an adaptation. If we don't manage transitions well, there can be nasty consequences. Poor transition management can prevent us from fully enjoying the new situation or from being able to deal with the demands of a new situation.

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A good example of this is waking up grumpy in the morning. What often happens when we wake up grumpy is that we blame the first person we see, who unfortunately is most likely to be someone we love a partner or a child. When we are not aware of our grumpiness we just see this other person as being irritating. We could attack that person for innocent or relatively harmless behaviours.....such as the way they hang a towel! This in turn could result in a fight with a loved one and then a miserable day to follow.

However, if you had developed the habit of starting your day with a Mindful Check-In with just a few mindful breaths, then you may notice that you're cranky and instead of attacking your loved one you may tell them that you're cranky and suggest that they give you a little bit of space. You then have a chance to get over your crankiness, without making it worse by attacking someone. In that way you are now able to save yourself a day of misery and have a relatively good day.

So managing transitions is really important and at times it can be quite difficult. It requires you to step back and reassess new situation. Sometimes we bring in something from the old situation that is difficult to let go of. For example, you may have had a hard day at work where you have had difficult interactions with co-workers. You can become really worried about what's going to happen there and get an unpleasant story going in your head about the office politics.

It is very hard to leave that kind of thing behind as you come home. If you are not able to leave it behind, at least you can acknowledge it in a respectful and mindful way, first to yourself and then to others if appropriate. If you let others know that you are stressed it can help them to orient themselves to you.

So the everyday mindfulness is useful for enhancing positive experiences, dealing with difficult situations and managing transitions. We find that we are much more able to use it in these ways if we practice it regularly. That is where it can be very helpful to go to classes or at least listen regularly to good quality.

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