

# WHAT IS MINDFULNESS

*If you are at peace, you are living in the present. – Lao Tzu*

The term “mindfulness” is used to describe a state of awareness that can be achieved by purposefully focusing attention to the unfolding of experience in the present moment, with a gentle and open mind. Mindfulness means becoming aware of what is happening in the here-and-now, both internally, and in the external world around you. Simply put, mindfulness is a state of active, open attention to the present. Mindfulness allows you to observe your thoughts and feelings from a distance, without judging them to be “good” or “bad.” When you’re mindful, you are living fully in the present moment, instead of letting life pass you by.

Sometimes, it is easier to understand mindfulness in terms of what it is *not*. When you are not mindful, as we all are from time to time, you may find yourself doing more of the following:

- Making mistakes because of carelessness, inattention or distraction;
- Using drugs or alcohol for distraction or to ease negative feelings;
- Failing to notice feelings of discomfort, stress or tension;
- Being overly preoccupied with the future or the past;
- Getting lost in your own thoughts and feelings;
- Rushing, but never getting anything done;
- Feeling as though life is passing you by;
- Failing to truly pay attention to others;
- Over-reacting in emotional ways;
- Judging yourself harshly;
- Eating mindlessly;
- Listening poorly.

The benefits of mindfulness, from stress reduction to relationship satisfaction to job performance, are numerous and well-documented. However, finding ways to make mindfulness a part of everyday life is something that most people still find hard to do. Fortunately, you do not need to dedicate a lifetime to learning ancient meditational practices to begin to reap many of the benefits of mindfulness. All you need to start is an open mind and perhaps 10-15 minutes of time.

