

Refresh

The science of sleep for optimal performance and well being



Unit 5: The Magic of Mindfulness

We realize that everyone has different ideas about how to relax. Some people are more open to alternative techniques for relaxation, others prefer to zone out with a Lifetime movie. While we realize you might be skeptical, we want to introduce you to a technique that's catching on with CEOs, pop stars, health professionals and even (gasp!) college students. Mindfulness is the practice of living in the moment. It may sound pretty easy, but it actually can be difficult, especially for achievement-minded college students.

A growing body of research suggests mindfulness practice may help improve sleep as well as physical and emotional well-being.

Mindfulness can be practiced in lots of different ways. To start, try incorporating it into the deep breathing exercises we discussed last week.

Mindfulness focused breathing:

"The mind is like a monkey, it goes in a thousand different directions, but the breath only goes in two"

1. Begin deep breathing, like you learned last week.
2. Focus your attention to the experience of breathing. For example:
 - Notice how your how the air feels as it rushes through your nostrils and down into your lungs.
 - Notice how the air feels as it gently flows out from your nostrils.
 - Notice the sound of the air flowing in with inhalation and out with exhalation.
 - Notice the feeling of your clothing on your abdomen, chest, and shoulders as your abdomen and chest expand and relax with each breath.

Sounds silly, until you try it and walk away relaxed for the first time all week. There is no way to fail in mindfulness practice. However, it's important that you're able to suspend judgment. When you notice your mind has wandered, gently bring your attention back to your breathing. Likewise, if you notice your thoughts are judgmental, gently bring your attention back to your breathing.

Read below for another common mindfulness exercise.

Body-scan mindfulness exercise:

Start with mindfulness deep breathing described above. Then scan over each body part as follows (or in another order and combination you prefer):

1. Bring your attention to your feet, notice all sensations in your feet. Are your feet warm or cold? Is there any pain or discomfort? Are there any points of pressure? Can you feel the

socks on your feet, or cool sheets on your bare feet? Without any judgment, simply allow yourself to focus on these sensations. If you find yourself judging a feeling of pain, pressure, or a subtle sensation as either good or bad, gently bring your attention back to the sensations themselves. Whenever you find your mind wandering, gently bring your attention back to the sensations of your feet. The more your mind wanders, the more opportunities you have to practice.

2. Repeat the process, bringing your attention to your legs. Are your legs warm or cold? Is there any pain? Are there any points of pressure? Can you feel the clothes or blankets touching your skin? Without any judgment, simply allow yourself to focus on these sensations. If you find yourself judging a feeling of pain, pressure, or a subtle sensation as either good or bad, gently bring your attention back to the sensations themselves. Whenever you find your mind wandering, gently bring your attention back to the sensations of your legs. The more your mind wanders, the more opportunities you have to practice.

3. Repeat the same process, bringing your attention to your abdomen...

4. Then, bringing your attention to your chest...

5. Then, bringing your attention to your back...

6. Then, bringing your attention to your shoulders...

7. ...arms...

8. ...hands...

9. ...neck...

10. ...face...

11. ...ears...

12. ...scalp...

How's it been going? Follow-up on the success of your sleep scheduling efforts:

1. Use your sleep log to calculate the total number of hours you have slept over the last week.
2. Divide by 7 to determine the average number of hours you sleep every night.
3. Determine the average time it takes every evening to fall asleep.
4. Determine the total average amount of time you spend in bed awake.

Here is how to make adjustments to your recommended sleep schedule, if needed:

Determine if both of the following have been true for you over the last week.

1. Are you able to fall asleep, on average, within 30 minutes at night?

2. Do you spend, on average, less than 45 minutes lying in bed awake during the night?

If you answer yes to both questions above, consider how refreshed you feel during the daytime. Are you tired during most daytime hours? If not, you should probably continue with your current sleep schedule. On the other-hand, if you are sleeping well during the time you schedule for sleep but remain tired during much of the day, try adding 1/2 hour to your sleep schedule, consistently getting up 1/2 hour later or going to bed 1/2 hour earlier.

If you answer "no" to one or both of the questions listed above, consider making some adjustments. Are you waking up at the same time every morning? Are you avoiding alcohol late in the evening and coffee after lunch time? If you haven't done so already, try eliminating all caffeine after lunch time and all alcohol entirely. If this seems completely unrealistic, try cutting back. We realize everyone has different habits, but any change in the right direction is a good one. Be sure to avoid daytime naps longer than one hour and to avoid taking naps late in the evening. If you are already doing all of these things and are still consistently unable to fall asleep in less than 30 minutes after going to bed, or if you are spending a total of 45 minutes or more during the night lying in bed awake, consider reducing the number of hours you are scheduling for sleep by 1/2 hour.

DO NOT restrict nighttime sleep to less than 6 hours per night. Even if you are not able to sleep for six hours in a row, allow yourself to relax in bed during six consecutive hours per night, so your body can sleep as much as it wants to during that period of time.

Practice Suggestions:

1. Make adjustments to your sleep schedule following the steps outlined above and implement your new sleep schedule during the next 14 days.
2. Practice mindfulness breathing or another mindfulness exercise for at least 10 minutes daily.
3. Continue to use the 30 second sleep diary. Keep saving your sleep diaries. You'll continue to use them to make adjustments to your sleep schedule.

Thirty Second Sleep Diary:

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Time you went to bed last night:							
Time you got out of bed this morning:							
Number of minutes you estimate it took you to fall asleep last night:							
Number of times you remember waking up in the middle of the night:							
Total number of minutes you estimate you were awake in during the night:							
Total amount of sleep you had last night:							
Number (none = 0) alcoholic beverages you consumed before going to bed last night:							
Did you take any sleeping medication last night (record “yes” or “no”)? If yes specify.							
How much did you enjoy sleeping last night? 0 1 2 3 Not at all Very much							
How refreshed do you feel this morning? 0 1 2 3 Not at all Very much							

Adapted from Morin, C.M., and Espie, C.A., *Insomnia: A Clinical Guide to Assessment and Treatment*, Springer 2004.