

Massachusetts General Hospital BMT Survivorship Program

Mindfulness and Gratitude

Mindfulness is simply being in the present moment and accepting it without judgment. There are many mental and physical health benefits of mindfulness. Mindfulness is helpful for tolerating painful experiences and emotions. Mindfulness works by helping to accept negative thoughts, feelings, and experiences and instead of fighting them, allowing them to pass without judgment.

Here are some tips to get started with mindfulness meditation:

- Just go with it. Begin by focusing your attention. Just observe your natural state, your thoughts and emotions as they are today. Each day may be different. Each moment may be different. Just observe your thoughts without judgment.
- Sensory awareness. Notice each of your five senses. What are you hearing? What are you seeing? What sensations can you notice in your body?
- Mindfulness is a skill. Just with any skill it takes practice. Mindfulness may feel uncomfortable at first. It may not even seem relaxing. That's okay- just notice those reactions without judgment.
- Accept exactly where you are. Practice having compassion for yourself and where you are today. The goal is to accept each moment with judgment. If you become distracted, (which is expected!) gently redirect your thoughts to the present moment.

Great times to practice being mindful:

Try practicing these brief exercises while stuck in traffic, on hold on the phone, in the doctor's waiting room, when someone says something that bothers you, at all red lights, when waiting for a phone call, when waiting for or during medical procedures, when you feel overwhelmed by your to do list, when standing in line, and when in pain.

Can you think of any other situations where practicing mindfulness may be helpful?

Brief Mindfulness Exercises

Exercise 1: Imagine

Picture yourself in a place you find relaxing

Imagine a scene in nature or on a vacation

Imagine what it would feel like to be one of the following:

- Tree (strong, rooted, expansive)
- Mountain (timeless, strong, stable)
- Wave (fluid, limitless)
- Sun (radiant, warm)

Exercise 2: Mindfulness

Pay attention to the sounds around you, noticing even distant sounds, like electrical appliances, or traffic outside. You don't have to like or dislike them, simply accept what sounds are there. Notice the sensations in your body, such as those in your feet or hands. Notice the sensations of breathing, either at the tip of your nose, or deep in your belly.

Exercise 3: Breathe out your stressor

As you breathe in, focus on your current stressful feeling. As you breathe out, focus letting that stressful feeling leave your mind and body.

Gratitude Exercises

Exercise 1: Daily Gratitude Journal

Start a gratitude journal. Every night, write down three things you are grateful for today. They can be things that went well, small or large things you appreciated and why. The goal is to be as detailed as possible as to why you are grateful. Another exercise to write about how you would feel if you did not have those things, or if those good things did not happen.

Exercise 2: Without my Blessing

Winning first place in a competition can feel great. But what if you came in second? You would probably focus on why you missed first place. The rationale behind that is gratitude. Imagine a blessing in your life (e.g., meeting your spouse or partner). Now, imagine if you did not meet them. What would be different? What would be missed? This exercise can help make you feel happier.

Exercise 3: From Bad to Good

Think about something bad that happened—perhaps becoming sick and having to go through bone marrow transplant. How did you grow from it? How did it make you appreciate what you have? Sometimes we go through bad experiences, but they can bring blessings in disguises. Choose a stressful or unwanted experience in your life. Is there any good that came from it? Did it challenge you in a way that made you recognize how strong you are? Did it bring you closer to someone? Did it give you a new experience that you would not have otherwise had? Have you grown in any way from this experience?