



Horses and Mindfulness Resource Materials

A booklet to help you get the most out of
your Mindfulness course



What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness has been described as “...the *awareness* that emerges through *paying attention on purpose*, in the *present moment*, and *non-judgementally* to the unfolding of experience, moment to moment”.

It is the process of bringing *focused attention* to the breath, physical sensations, thoughts, sounds and emotions...to all that is present in the here-and-now.

The practice of bringing *intentional, focused and non-judgemental attention to our experience in the present moment*, allows us to simply observe what our experience is.

Mindfulness or Awareness allows us to develop *skilful responses* to events, rather than *reacting* out of past patterns of behaviour, to live in the present moment without constantly going over past events and worrying about the future).

Horses and Mindfulness

Horses can help us with our Mindfulness practice in a number of ways.

- As our guides – horses are masters of Mindfulness because, as prey animals, they remain in a state of awareness of their environment, using all their senses, but only reacting when necessary.
- Through activities – when we are sharing space with a horse, we need to remain focused on the present as the horse may react to a change in the environment quicker than we normally would
- By entering their environment – not only the horses but also the other non-human animals and elements of the natural world encourage us to be in touch with our senses
- Calming presence –the horses’ breathing and energy can have a powerful effect when we share their space. We have found that simply practicing Mindfulness in the company of horses enriches our own experience.

Automatic Pilot

In a car we can sometimes drive for miles "on automatic pilot," without really being aware of what we are doing. In the same way, we may not be really "present", moment-by-moment, for much of our lives: we can often be "miles away" without knowing it.

On automatic pilot, we are more likely to have our "buttons pressed": events around us, and thoughts, feelings and sensations in the mind (of which we may be only dimly aware) can trigger old habits of thinking that are often unhelpful, and may lead on to worsening mood.

By becoming more aware of our thoughts, feelings, and body sensations, from moment to moment, we give ourselves the possibility of greater freedom and choice; we do not have to go down the same old "mental ruts" that may have caused problems in the past.

The aim of mindfulness programs is to increase awareness so that we can **respond to situations with choice, rather than react automatically**. We do that by practising becoming more aware of where our attention is, and deliberately changing the focus of attention, over and over again.

Tips for the Body Scan

1. Regardless of what happens, "just do it!"
2. If your mind is wandering a lot, simply note the thoughts (as passing events) and then bring the mind gently back to the Body Scan.
3. Let go of ideas of "success", "failure", "doing it really well", or "trying to purify the body"
4. Let go of any expectations about what the Body Scan will do for you: Imagine it as a seed you have planted. The more you poke around and interfere, the less it will be able to develop. So with the Body Scan, just give it the right conditions - peace and quiet, regular and frequent practice - that is all.
5. Try approaching your experience in each moment with the kindly attitude: "OK, that's just the way things are right now". If you try to fight off unpleasant thoughts, feelings, or body sensations, they will only distract you from doing anything else.

Dealing with Barriers to the Body Scan

Even if we are unaware of moment-to-moment thoughts, they influence our reactions. We may find ourselves feeling annoyed or anxious, snapping at a loved one or hiding ourselves away – and because we have not noticed the thoughts, we can't understand why. This in itself can be worrying. What is wrong with us? Why are we reacting like this? Becoming aware of our own habitual thought patterns can help us to make sense of how we feel, and opens up options for how we wish to respond.

A powerful pattern of thought that takes us away from being "fully present" in each moment is our automatic tendency to judge our experience as being not quite right in some way – this is not what should be happening, not good enough, or not what we expected or wanted. These judgements can lead to sequences of thoughts about blame, what needs to be changed, or how things could or should be different. Often, these thoughts will take us, quite automatically, down some fairly well worn paths in our minds. Before we know where we are, we are feeling bad and reacting in old, knee-jerk ways. We may lose awareness of the moment, and also lose the freedom to choose what, if any, action needs to be taken.

The Body Scan provides an opportunity to practise simply bringing an interested, gentle and friendly awareness to the way things are in each moment, without having to do anything to change things. Achieving some special state - even relaxation - is not a goal to aim for in the practice. There is no goal to be achieved.

Mindfulness of the Body in Movement

In these exercises we continue to cultivate awareness of the body, and especially the body in movement. This is an important step towards being able to respond helpfully to painful emotions. Emotions express themselves in the body. So becoming more aware of what is happening in the body fine tunes our sensitivity to subtle shades of mood.

This may not at first be easy. If we have experienced painful feelings in the past, it is understandable that emotions like fear or unhappiness feel like threats to be avoided – by walling them off, suppressing them, numbing out, pretending they are not there. But if we disconnect from painful feelings and body sensations, then we cannot respond to them effectively. And our ability to feel anything at all – positive or negative – may become muted, so that we lose touch with the full experience of being alive.

Attempting to avoid emotions, thoughts and body sensations can become a habit. We may believe it protects us – but research has shown that avoiding unpleasant feelings actually keeps them going. They are still there, even if we are not aware of them. They indirectly influence our attitudes and judgements in ways that can turn passing unpleasant feelings into persistent suffering. *Unless we are aware.* But when 'tuning out' has become a habit, how can we learn to tune back in, without being overwhelmed?

A first step is to learn to tune into body sensations and feelings, just as we did in the Body Scan. This opens opportunities to respond more effectively to unpleasant emotions as they arise. We focus on mindful movement and on the sensations of the breath

Mindfulness Standing Postures (Stretch and Breath)

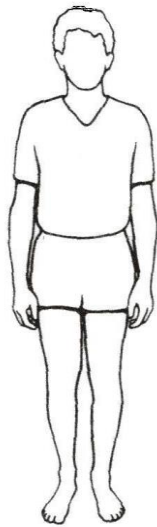


Figure a

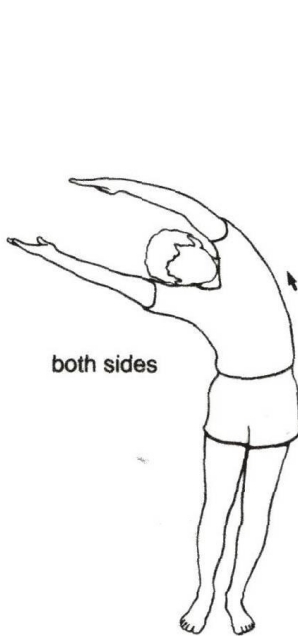
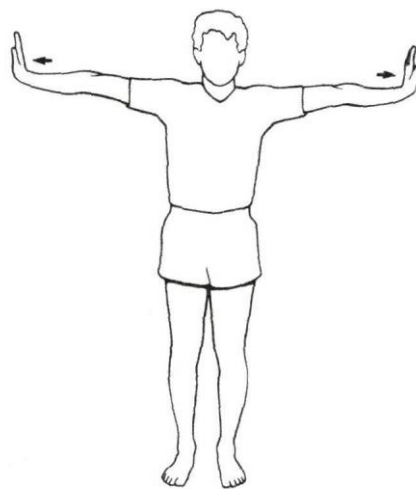


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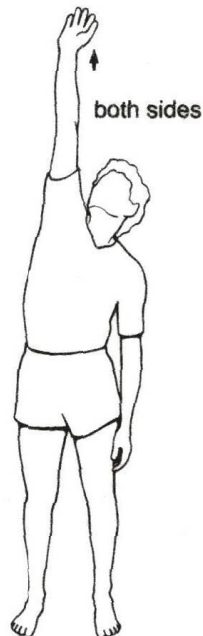


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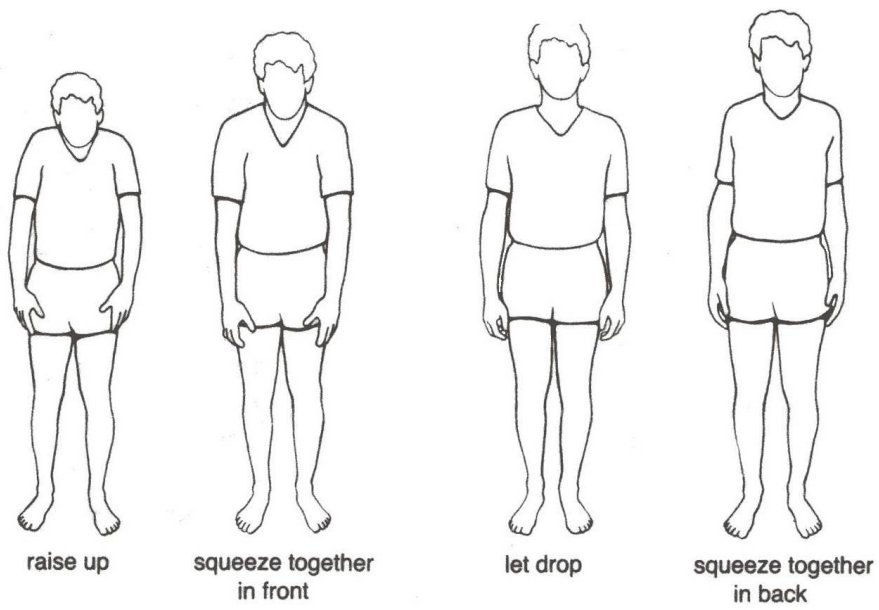


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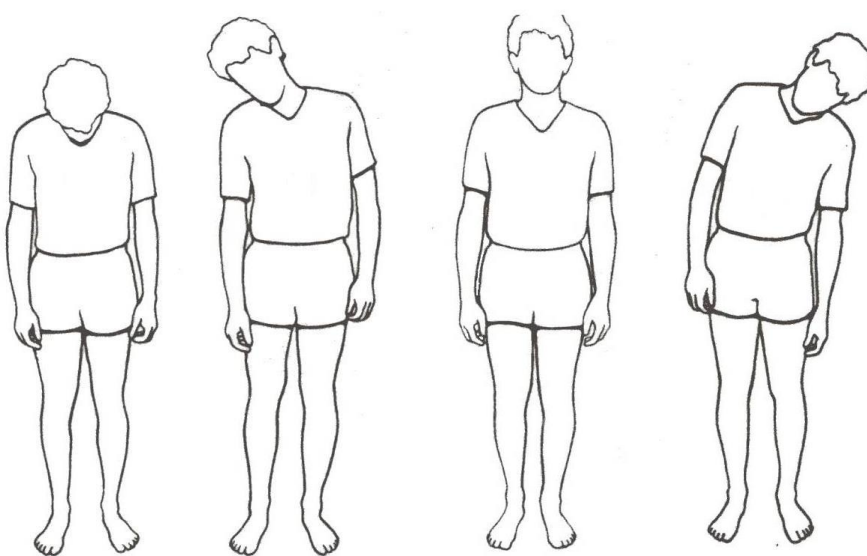


Figure e

Mindfulness of the Breath

Guidance for Sitting Meditation

1. Settle into a comfortable sitting position, either on a straight-backed chair or on a soft surface on the floor, with your buttocks supported by cushions or a low stool.
2. Allow the back to adopt an erect and dignified posture. This is the physical counterpart of the inner attitudes of self-reliance, self-acceptance, patience, and alert attention that we are cultivating. Gently close the eyes.
3. Bring your awareness to the level of physical sensations by focusing your attention on the sensations of touch, contact, and pressure in your body where it makes contact with the floor and with whatever you are sitting on.
4. Now bring your awareness to the changing patterns of physical sensations in the abdomen as the breath moves in and out of the body.
5. Focus your awareness on the sensations of slight stretching as the abdominal wall rises with each in-breath, and on the sensations of gentle deflation as the abdominal wall falls with each out breath.
6. There is no need to try to control the breathing in any way - simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can, also bring this attitude of allowing to the rest of your experience - there is nothing to be fixed, no particular state to be achieved - as best you can, simply allow your experience to be your experience without needing it to be other than it is.
7. Sooner or later (usually sooner), the mind will wander away from the focus on the breath in the lower abdomen to thoughts, planning, daydreams, drifting along – whatever. This is perfectly OK - it's simply what minds do - it is not a mistake or a failure. When you notice that your awareness is no longer on the breath, gently congratulate yourself - you have come back and are once more aware of your experience. Then, gently escort the awareness back to your breathing.
8. As best you can, bring a quality of kindness to your awareness, perhaps seeing the repeated wanderings of the mind as opportunities to bring patience and gentle curiosity to your experience.

The Breath

Breath is life. You could think of the breath as being like a thread or chain that links and connects all the events of your life from birth, the beginning, to death, the end. The breath is always there every moment, moving by itself like a river.

Have you ever noticed how the breath changes with our moods -- short and shallow when we're tense or angry, faster when we're excited, slow and full when we're happy, and almost disappearing when we're afraid. It's there with us all the time. It can be used as a tool, like an anchor, to bring stability to the body and mind when we deliberately choose to become aware of it. We can tune into it at any moment during everyday life.

Mostly, we're not in touch with our breathing -- it's just there, forgotten. So one of the first things we do in mindfulness is to get in touch with it. We notice how the breath changes with our moods, our thoughts, our body movements. We don't have to control the breath. Just notice it and get to know it, like a friend. All that is necessary is to observe, watch, and feel the breath with a sense of interest in a relaxed manner.

With practice, we become more aware of our breathing. We can use it to direct our awareness to different aspects of our lives. For example, to relax tense muscles, or focus on a situation that requires attention. Breath can also be used to help deal with pain, anger, relationships or the stress of daily life. During this course, we will be exploring this in great detail.

Karen Ryder



The Three Minute Breathing Space Basic Instructions

1. *Awareness*

Bring yourself into the present moment by deliberately adopting an erect and dignified posture. If possible, close your eyes. Then ask:

"What is my experience right now? in thoughts in feelings
and in bodily sensations"

Acknowledge and register your experience, even if it is unwanted.

2. *Gathering*

Then gently redirect full attention to breathing, to each in-breath and to each out-breath as they follow one after another.

Your breath can function as an anchor to bring you into the present and to help you tune into a state of awareness and stillness.

3. *Expanding*

Expand the field of your awareness around your breathing so that it includes a sense of the body as a whole, your posture and facial expression.

The breathing space provides a way to step out of Automatic Pilot mode and reconnect with the present moment.

Using the Breathing Space: The Action Step

The Breathing Space provides a way to remind us to use activity to deal with unpleasant feelings as they arise.

After reconnecting with an expanded awareness in the Breathing Space, it may feel appropriate to take some **CONSIDERED ACTION**. In dealing with depressed feelings the following activities can be particularly helpful: doing something pleasurable; doing something

that will give you a sense of satisfaction or master; and acting mindfully. To work out which is most likely to be helpful, ask yourself:

- What do I need for myself right now?
- How can I best take care of myself right now?

Then try some of the following:

1. Doing Something Pleasurable

Be Kind to Your Body

Have a nice hot bath; have a nap; treat yourself to your favourite food without feeling guilty; have your favourite hot drink.

Engage in Enjoyable Activities

Go for a walk (maybe with the dog or a friend); visit a friend; do your favourite hobby; do some gardening; take some exercise; phone a friend; spend time with someone you like; cook a meal; go shopping; watch something funny or uplifting on TV; read something that gives you pleasure; listen to music that makes you feel good

Be aware of barriers to pleasure

. Be aware of 'killjoy thoughts' that tell you won't enjoy a pleasure you have planned, that you don't deserve it, that you should be enjoying it more, thoughts that distract you from fully experiencing what you are doing.

2. Doing Something That Gives You a Sense of Mastery, Satisfaction, Achievement or Control

Clean the house; clear out a cupboard or drawer; catch up with letter writing; do some work; pay a bill; do something that you have been putting off doing; take some exercise.

Be aware of high standards and "it should be different" thinking

They may make it hard for you to feel you have achieved anything worthwhile. Notice thoughts like "I should be doing this better/faster/more easily", recognise them for what they are, and let them be.

Things that are normally easy can be very difficult when mood is low. So give yourself the credit you would give another person struggling with a difficult task. It may well be helpful to *break tasks down into smaller steps and only tackle one step at a time*. Make sure you treat yourself kindly and with respect, and congratulate yourself whenever you complete a task or a part of a task.

3. **Acting Mindfully**

When mood is low, our minds tend to be preoccupied with worries. We may be going over and over things that have happened in the past, trying to make sense of why we feel the way we do, or anxiously wondering about the future. The end result is that our attention is not really on what we are doing – we are lost in our heads, rather than focussed on what is happening right here and now. This means that activities that might nourish us become depleting.

Notice if your mind has been hijacked by negative thoughts that tend to take you away from being present. Instead, have an intention to focus your entire attention on what you are doing right now. Keep yourself in the very moment you are in; put your mind in the present (e.g. "Now I am walking down the stairs...now I can feel the banister beneath my hand...now I'm walking into the kitchen...now I'm turning on the light..."). Be aware of your breathing as you do other things; be aware of the contact of your foot with the floor as you walk.

The more powerful your thoughts, the more difficult this may be. But, with practice, you will find that your capacity to be more fully present in each moment will grow.

Remember

Be open-minded

Whatever you choose to do, perform your action as an experiment. Don't pre-judge how you will feel after it is completed. Keep an open mind about whether doing this will be helpful in any way.

Aim for a broad range

Consider a range of activities and don't limit yourself to a favourite few. Sometimes trying new behaviours can be interesting in itself.

Don't expect miracles

Carry out what you have planned to do as best you can. Putting extra pressure on yourself by expecting a single activity to alter things dramatically may be unrealistic. Even a 1% change in your pattern of activities, increasing those that nourish you and decreasing those that deplete you, is helpful in building your overall sense of control in the face of shifts in your mood.

Ideas for Daily Mindfulness

- When you first wake up in the morning, before you get out of bed, bring your attention to your breathing. Observe 5 mindful breaths.
- Whenever you hear a phone ring, a bird sing, a train pass by, laughter, a car horn, the wind, the sound of a door closing - use any sound like the bell of mindfulness. Really listen, being present and awake.
- Throughout the day, take a few moments to bring your attention to your breathing. Observe 5 mindful breaths.
- Whenever you eat or drink something, take a minute and breathe.
- Notice your body while walking or standing. Take a moment to notice your posture. Pay attention to the contact of the ground under your feet. Feel the air on your face, arms, legs as you walk. Are you rushing?
- Whenever you are waiting in a line, use this time to notice standing and breathing. Feel the contact of your feet on the floor and how your body feels. Bring attention to the rising and falling of your abdomen. Are you feeling impatient?
- Be aware of any points of tightness in your body throughout the day. See if you can breathe into them and, as you exhale, let go of excess tension. Is there tension stored anywhere in your body? For example - your neck, shoulders, stomach, jaw, or lower back. If possible stretch or do yoga once a day.
- Focus attention on your daily activities - such as brushing your teeth, brushing your hair, washing up, putting on your shoes, doing your job. Bring mindfulness to each activity.
- Before you go to sleep at night, take a few minutes and bring your attention to your breathing. Observe 5 mindful breaths.

Whenever you feel you have 'lost it', when life feels really hard, or when your practice has been hard to sustain; remember that you can always come back to the breath. No matter how long you've been away, you can always start over again, in this moment, right here, right now.

Adapted from: Madeline Klyne, Instructor, Stress Reduction Clinic, University of Massachusetts Center (personal communication).

APPS

Headspace

Insight Timer

Breathe

Calm

Lets meditate

Dharma seed

Suggested Reading List

Full Catastrophe Living. - Jon Kabat-Zinn, (1990)

Coming To Our Senses. Jon Kabat-Zinn, (2005)

Mindfulness. A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World.

Mark Williams and Danny Penman (2011)

Awake in the Wild - Mark Coleman (2006)

Mindfulness in Nature as a path for self discovery

Mindful Thoughts for Walkers – Adam Ford (2017)

Living Well with Pain & Illness.

The Mindful Way to Free yourself from Suffering.

Vidyamala Burch

The Mindful Way Workbook

An 8 week Program to Free Yourself from Depression and Emotional Distress.

John Teasdale, Mark Williams, Zindel Seagal (2014)