

MINDFULNESS



*Be Productive,
Relaxed, and
Happy with
ADHD*

by Kirsten Milliken, PhD, PCC

FOR FIDGETERS

TODAY EVERYONE IS SO FOCUSED ON STAYING CONNECTED and working harder. We want to learn more, produce more, keep up, communicate, and cram as much into our day as we can. Whether in school, at work or in our personal lives, we are focused on productivity, outcomes, and staying connected. We seem to have lost sight of the value of nurturing our minds—having quiet time, pausing, being intentional, and enjoying the journey.

“There is more to life than increasing its speed.” – Gandhi

Those of us with ADHD are also working even harder to keep up in a neurotypical classroom or work environment. This can add to our stress and mental fatigue. In an effort to manage our stress and activate our frontal lobes, we make the mistake of turning to video games, phones, Netflix, or other mindless activities that feel instantly rewarding. We create crises, drama, and excitement to wake up our sleepy brains.

Rather than activating dopamine, we are living on adrenaline. In doing so, we are putting ourselves at risk for high blood pressure, diabetes, immune system fatigue, and other health problems. Rather than being refreshing and rejuvenating, this tendency to bombard our brains with stimulation can be overwhelming and make us “mindless” instead of “mindful.”

Mindfulness can sound daunting. Does it mean you have to sit in lotus pose, eyes closed, with a “quiet mind” for thirty-plus minutes. Oh, heck no! Meditation is one form of mindfulness—meditation does not equal mindfulness.

Let’s first understand what mindfulness is. Then I’ll give you some ways to be mindful that are not painful or boring.

Mindlessness vs mindfulness

In the process of trying to become more productive and efficient we have become *mindless*. *Mindlessness* is relying on old categories and habits. The human brain is wired to be effi-

cient—to draw from experience to explain our current circumstances. Relying on this default system means that we keep our focus on what is familiar. We rely on what we know and frame new experiences based on what is familiar.

Mindfulness, on the other hand, is defined as “Paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, nonjudgmentally.”

Mindfulness is more than just being aware. You can be aware that you feel hungry. But mindfulness about being hungry means focusing your attention on how it feels in your body, what you have an urge to eat, and your full anticipation of the experience of the meal.

Purposely paying attention is a very important part of mindfulness. It involves being deliberate and intentional about noticing the details of an entire experience. For instance, you can pop a raisin in your mouth and swallow it, or you can take one raisin and purposely focus on chewing it repeatedly. Noticing its texture and taste. How it changes as you chew it. How it feels in different parts of your mouth.

Living in the present moment is also important. Left to our own devices our mind’s default is to create context and to categorize our current experiences. To do so, most of our thoughts will be about the past or the future. We think about the potential outcome of our choices or how we reacted the last time we were in a similar situation.

The past no longer exists.

The future has not arrived yet.

*The only moment we really can experience
is the present moment—*

The one we seem most to avoid.

When we are being mindful we are noticing what is going on right now. We are observant.

Practice nonjudgmental acceptance. This is the tricky part! In our journey to become more mindful, we need to accept certain things. One is that we have very little control over our emotions. We cannot influence when an emotion will occur or when it will cease. When we try to avoid or escape our feelings, we can create more problems and become more miserable. A mindful way to handle emotions is to see them for what they are. They are nei-

ther right nor wrong; they are just there. This approach can help you to avoid being overwhelmed by feelings and making decisions that you might regret later.

Just as mindlessness keeps us in a narrow state of mind, a mindful state creates openness to new information. Mindfulness allows us to engage in continual creation of new categories- to think outside the box. By paying attention purposely, in the present moment, nonjudgmentally to the situation and context, we are no longer relying on past experience to understand our current situation—we are open to all possibilities.

Try it right now!

Close your eyes and sit quietly for a few minutes. Is your mind completely silent, or do you find that thoughts and feelings seem to automatically jump into your consciousness? The longer you

TIPS FOR THE FIDGETY

So, how about those non-boring mindfulness tips I promised you?!

1 Relax!

While you may not be aware of it in the moment, the longer you work the lower your concentration. When stress levels go down, neurological pleasure and motivation increase. By stopping to mindfully relax several times an hour, you can significantly enhance your capacity to work.

Yawning improves performance! That's right. Yawning actually increases cerebral blood flow and clears away brain fog. Yawning has been found to be the quickest way to lower mental stress and anxiety. So next time your yawning becomes contagious, you are helping to reduce everyone's stress and increase their efficiency.



TRY THIS!

Have a bell ring one or two times an hour. The first two times you hear it, just pause for ten seconds to yawn and slowly stretch. On the third ring, take sixty seconds to daydream or do something pleasurable. Then throw yourself back into work.



2 Mindful kindness.

A team of Japanese university researchers found that college students increased their sense of happiness simply by counting their own acts of kindness for one week.

TRY THIS!

Do this little experiment and watch what happens tomorrow. Take out a sheet of paper and write down every act of kindness you did yesterday.

Want to be more proactive? Make a commitment to consciously do one act of kindness tomorrow. Write down three or four things you might do, then close your eyes and use your imagination to carry out these acts of kindness.

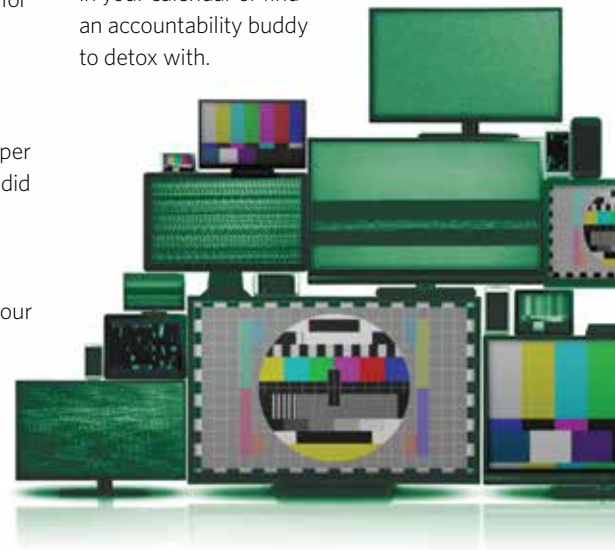
3 Disconnect from the online world.

This is the big times. But you can start small. Turn off your phone for fifteen minutes or an hour (if you're feeling brave). Let go of the need to feel updated. As you get used to this, increase the time and avoid all screens for a half day—or more. Be mindful about experiencing any boredom from this.

TRY THIS!

If you want to do a digital detox, set yourself up for success. Create an autoresponder to go out to people who try to contact you while you are offline. Let them know when you will be back online.

Make sure to schedule the time offline in your calendar or find an accountability buddy to detox with.



sit there and allow your mind to wander, the more you'll realize there is a seemingly endless stream of thoughts and feelings flowing in and out of your consciousness. But if you are patient, observing the feelings, thoughts, and sensations without judging them—just allowing them to be present and allowing yourself to remain present as you observe—you'll slowly begin to experience a growing sense of clarity and serenity.

Research has identified that mindfulness strengthens areas of your brain involved with confidence, optimism, emotional regulation, happiness, self-love, and compassion for others. Researchers at Wake Forest University School of Medicine found that just three or four days of practicing mindfulness improves cognition and reduces anxiety, depression, pain, and fatigue. Mindfulness also helps to quiet the emotionally reactive areas of our brains. It improves learning, memory, and decision making.



4 Are you determined to meditate?

If you really want to meditate, start with short sessions. Especially if you are trying the sit-still type of meditation. Recognize that even the intention to meditate is a form of mindfulness.

TRY THIS!

You don't have to sit to meditate. My favorite meditation class involves walking meditation. Find an interesting, quiet environment that has an open area or clear path that you can walk on without being disturbed. By noticing the breath, feeling the body, listening to sound and tuning into other senses, you can turn any activity into a mindful meditation.



ALL IMAGES SHUTTERSTOCK

In the research on mindfulness, most of the outcomes boil down to three major benefits: improved performance, reduced stress, and greater satisfaction in work and life.

Like any new activity, mindfulness may feel awkward at first. But like exercise, the more you do it, the easier it gets and the stronger your mind will be—so you can be productive, relaxed and happy, with ADHD. Now go get your calendar and pick a strategy and a day to start. 🗓️

Kirsten Milliken, PhD, PCC, has dedicated herself to supporting people with ADHD to live their best lives. A licensed clinical psychologist, certified ADHD coach, developer and podcast host of *Your ADHD Life, Inc.*, she is also the author of *PlayDHD: Permission to Play, A Prescription for Adults With ADHD* (2016). You can read more from Dr. Milliken at www.YourADHDLife.com.

5 Anchors away!

By having a set time, place, or activity that prompts you to pause, take a breath, and observe the moment, you can start to create a consistent habit of mindfulness.

TRY THIS!

Choose anchors that occur on a regular basis. For instance, pause for one moment and breathe consciously before you open an incoming email or answer a phone call.



6 There's an app for that!

What would an article on ADHD be without some apps to try?

- **10% Happier**—meditation for fidgety skeptics (bingo!)
- **My Light Shines Bright**—features 22 guided meditations to build confidence, encourage good sleep, creativity, and deep connection
- **Headspace (For Kids)**—a popular mindfulness app for children that offers five themes (Calm, Focus, Kindness, Sleep and Wake Up) plus activities including soothing sounds, breathing and visualization exercises, and more
- **Smiling Mind**—ten weeks of mindfulness for various age groups
- **The Mindfulness App**—a five-day guided practice and introduction to mindfulness
- **Mindfulness Daily**—21 days of free mindfulness exercises
- **Buddhify**—80 meditations for all parts of your day