

Meditation 101

Our minds whirl with, approximately, one thought every 1.2 seconds. To become more present in the moment, we need to train our minds to focus on what is around us. One of the benefits of meditation (or mindfulness) is that it lowers stress by relaxing and calming the mind. If you are just beginning, your goal may be to practice for five minutes each day. This will begin to change your mind helping you feel more centered, settled and present throughout the day. Also, it can give you tools to deal with some of the stress points in your daily life.

To get started, the simplest method is to choose an otherwise mundane task and strive to fully experience that moment with all your senses. This could be having a shower, getting dressed, eating breakfast, doing the dishes, brushing your teeth, etc. Generally, our minds are anywhere but on the task at hand. Usually, our thoughts are on the multiple things planned for the day and what surprises are in store.

This exercise becomes one of focus. If you find your mind wandering, you will want to refocus. Acknowledge stray thoughts and, then, allow them to flow away.

With practice, it does become easier.

Exercise 1 - Shower Example:

Objective: To immerse yourself in the experience of having a shower.

- As you turn the water on, remind yourself that this is going to be a great shower.
- Hear the sound of warm water cascading over you.
- Feel the slipperiness of the soap between your fingers.
- See how the water glides down your body from the shower head.
- Breathe in the steam filling the shower.
- Enjoy the taste of the spray of water.
- The smell of the fresh towel as you dry off.
- Feel how your body feels clean and rejuvenated.

Reflect on all the sensations and thoughts you had during your shower. Think about how much you enjoyed this shower as it prepared you for the day ahead. This focuses you to live in the present.

The next exercise is to calm your mind prior to sleep. Music can help with this process. You might want to try listening to some nature sounds – ones that you find soothing and non-intrusive like falling rain, waterfalls, waves hitting the beach, birds singing. This can block out that “white noise” which could be interfering with your focus.

Some sites offer free MP3 downloads of relaxation music and sounds. Here are a couple of examples from SoundCloud:

<https://soundcloud.com/newagewandereruniverse/rainfall-along-the-ocean?in=newagewandereruniverse/sets/serenity-new-age-relaxing>

<https://soundcloud.com/newagewandereruniverse/meditation-in-the-rain?in=newagewandereruniverse/sets/serenity-new-age-relaxing>

Exercise 2 - Sleep Example:

Objective: To sleep more restfully.

- Tell yourself that you will have a deep restful sleep as you get into bed.
- See your bed is ready for you.
- Feel the softness of the sheets as you crawl in and find that comfortable position.
- Breathe deeply and relax, noticing the sweet smell of your pillow.
- Focus on relaxing every part of your body.
- Start with your toes and work through every body part up to your head and brain.
- Feel all of you unwind as you start to fall into a deeper sleep.
- Tune out any background sounds and cast away unbidden thoughts.

With practice, you may find it easier to get to sleep and even feel more refreshed in the morning.