

## Mindfulness: Alert Awareness

In our series of stress management, we have noted resiliency & hardy personalities, holism & being whole to care for others, microaggression & changing your milieu to control anger, and the benefits of exercise in decreasing cortisol immune suppression. Today let us introduce ourselves to how mindfulness and alert awareness bring relaxation.

**What exactly is mindfulness?** In a nutshell, mindfulness is an ability to train yourself for paying attention to all of your senses and how your body feels, all at the same time. Consider your routine commute to work or school or somewhere else you typically drive to frequently. With the pandemic, traffic is drastically reduced. But, on an average day, we drive along lost in our thoughts and suddenly begin to see familiar sights that our commute will end. We may have been driving for many minutes and it seems like only a millisecond!

Instead of having your mind ricocheting from thought to thought, mindfulness based stress management trains your brain to witness your surroundings and your physical feelings with a sense of gratitude. Another way to explain mindfulness might be instead of just eating an apple we appreciate that the apple was grown in nature and delivered to the market with purpose for our body's nutrition.

Mindfulness activities include mindful walking back and forth in a same location but with the purpose of experiencing the walk, body scanning to move your awareness from the top of your head and downward to your feet by stopping at each body part to consider, gentle yoga postures of stretching awareness, and of course, lovingkindness as soulful connection to others. If you believe in intercessory prayer, this is a form of lovingkindness connection.

You may be feeling distracted or overwhelmed from too much fear and information overload as we travel through the pandemic. **Attached are some suggestions for your consideration to build your alert awareness and rebuild a sense of gratitude.**

Jon Kabat Zinn's 9 Attitudes of Mindfulness <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2n7FOBFMvXg>

Mindfulness Body Scan <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2UFYXYQHjA>

Mindful Walking <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bEYb8MvHMP0>

Mindful Breathing: Calm During Covid <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3J44eaFb2g>

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Adapted from Seaward, B. L. (2020). Essentials of stress management. MA: Jones & Bartlett Publishers

# Mindfulness Activities

**Purpose:** Mindfulness can re-train us to feel gratitude for our surroundings and bring happiness and calm to stressful situations. The activities listed here are ways to begin mindfulness practice as an individual, or with your family or a group of friends.



## **Grape or Apple Mindfulness-(1-3 minutes)**

1. Before eating your fruit, notice its shape, color, aroma, sensation in your fingertips and feel as you turn and touch its peel.
2. While eating your fruit, delay swallowing after each of several small bites, until after you have taken in the taste, sensation, and volume of the food. Feel the food in your mouth and throat. Feel the sensation of saliva and swallowing.



## **Walking Mindfulness- (5-8 minutes)**

1. Determine where you will walk, if you will walk alone or with others. A place of nature is recommended. Having your own path, not a shared path, is encouraged.
2. Walk from point A about 10-20 steps to point B, turn and slowly walk back and forth 10 times.
3. While you are walking, do not talk or hum, or sing, but stay quiet and use your eyes and senses to take in all that you see while moving back and forth, not stopping to consider, just allowing the experience of walking to be mindful of what is present.
4. Do you feel sunshine or cold? Is there animal or flower nature to behold? Gravel under your feet? Sounds of walking, nature, water, winds or rustling? Note your breathing and mindfully slow your breaths.



## **Shared [Visual] Human Mindfulness- (5 minutes)**

1. Pair up with a friend or family member, sit facing each other in a comfortable position on comfortable furniture or on pillows on the floor.
2. Begin by allowing yourselves to be present in silence, try to gaze easily at each other without talking or smiling or laughter.
3. Start at an awareness of the other's head and facial features, move to the neck, then shoulders, taking in hair color, eye color, features of ears, cheekbones, shape of the neck, and skin.
4. Share your discoveries with your friend or family member after 5 minutes.

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