

# Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) is a program that helps people learn to practice mindfulness. Mindfulness is the practice of intentionally paying attention to the present moment. It can be learned and practiced through techniques such as education, breathing exercises, meditation, and yoga. MBSR includes several mindfulness techniques in one program.

MBSR works best when you understand the treatment, are willing to try new things, and can commit to spending time practicing what you learn. MBSR training may include learning about:

- How your emotions, thoughts, and reactions affect your body.
- New ways to respond to things that cause negative thoughts to start (*triggers*).
- How to notice your thoughts and let go of them.
- Practicing awareness of everyday things that you normally do without thinking.
- The techniques and goals of different types of meditation.

## What are the benefits of MBSR?

MBSR can have many benefits, which include helping you to:

- Develop self-awareness. This refers to knowing and understanding yourself.
- Learn skills and attitudes that help you to participate in your own health care.
- Learn new ways to care for yourself.
- Be more accepting about how things are, and let things go.
- Be less judgmental and approach things with an open mind.
- Be patient with yourself and trust yourself more.

MBSR has also been shown to:

- Reduce negative emotions, such as depression and anxiety.
- Improve memory and focus.
- Change how you sense and approach pain.
- Boost your body's ability to fight infections.
- Help you connect better with other people.
- Improve your sense of well-being.

## Follow these instructions at home:

- Find a local in-person or online MBSR program.
- Set aside some time regularly for mindfulness practice.
- Find a mindfulness practice that works best for you. This may include one or more of the following:
  - Meditation. Meditation involves focusing your mind on a certain thought or activity.
  - Breathing awareness exercises. These help you to stay present by focusing on your breath.
  - Body scan. For this practice, you lie down and pay attention to each part of your body from head to toe. You can identify tension and soreness and intentionally relax parts of your body.



- Yoga. Yoga involves stretching and breathing, and it can improve your ability to move and be flexible. It can also provide an experience of testing your body's limits, which can help you release stress.
- Mindful eating. This way of eating involves focusing on the taste, texture, color, and smell of each bite of food. Because this slows down eating and helps you feel full sooner, it can be an important part of a weight-loss plan.
- Find a podcast or recording that provides guidance for breathing awareness, body scan, or meditation exercises. You can listen to these any time when you have a free moment to rest without distractions.
- Follow your treatment plan as told by your health care provider. This may include taking regular medicines and making changes to your diet or lifestyle as recommended.



## How to practice mindfulness

To do a basic awareness exercise:

- Find a comfortable place to sit.
- Pay attention to the present moment. Observe your thoughts, feelings, and surroundings just as they are.
- Avoid placing judgment on yourself, your feelings, or your surroundings. Make note of any judgment that comes up, and let it go.
- Your mind may wander, and that is okay. Make note of when your thoughts drift, and return your attention to the present moment.

To do basic mindfulness meditation:

- Find a comfortable place to sit. This may include a stable chair or a firm floor cushion.
  - Sit upright with your back straight. Let your arms fall next to your side with your hands resting on your legs.
  - If sitting in a chair, rest your feet flat on the floor.
  - If sitting on a cushion, cross your legs in front of you.
- Keep your head in a neutral position with your chin dropped slightly. Relax your jaw and rest the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth. Drop your gaze to the floor. You can close your eyes if you like.
- Breathe normally and pay attention to your breath. Feel the air moving in and out of your nose. Feel your belly expanding and relaxing with each breath.
- Your mind may wander, and that is okay. Make note of when your thoughts drift, and return your attention to your breath.
- Avoid placing judgment on yourself, your feelings, or your surroundings. Make note of any judgment or feelings that come up, let them go, and bring your attention back to your breath.
- When you are ready, lift your gaze or open your eyes. Pay attention to how your body feels after the meditation.

## Where to find more information

You can find more information about MBSR from:

- Your health care provider.
- Community-based meditation centers or programs.
- Programs offered near you.

## Summary

- Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) is a program that teaches you how to intentionally pay attention to the present moment. It is used with other treatments to help you cope better with daily stress, emotions, and pain.
- MBSR focuses on developing self-awareness, which allows you to respond to life stress without judgment or negative emotions.
- MBSR programs may involve learning different mindfulness practices, such as breathing exercises, meditation, yoga, body scan, or mindful eating. Find a mindfulness practice that works best for you, and set aside time for it on a regular basis.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.

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