



Penn Program for Mindfulness

Week 1: A Fresh Start

Welcome

Beginning right now, you can take a fresh start that will make a real difference in your life. You are going to spend the next two months learning about something called “mindfulness.” Mindfulness is much more than a relaxation technique or a stress management method. It is a completely different way to live each moment, a new approach that will show you how to dramatically improve the way you feel about yourself and your life. Many thousands of people have used what they have learned with us to make fundamental changes in their lives. These changes helped them to manage stress and loss, to find greater satisfaction and happiness, to let go of old hurts, to build and deepen relationships, and to find meaning and purpose in life. People who practice mindfulness are less troubled by everyday ups and downs. They rediscover a steady confidence that allows them to establish new goals and set out to accomplish them. They tell us that they have made a fundamental change in how they live. You can do the same.

What’s the Problem?

We ought to be able to eliminate stress. After all, the only thing that we need to do is to relax. But of course it’s not that easy. Our usual attempts to escape stress don’t last for long. They help for a day, or sometimes a week. But eventually that constricted feeling comes back. Sometimes it comes with familiar patterns of reactivity: frustration, anger, sadness or disappointment. We wonder if we’re doing something wrong, or if it’s just impossible to find a solution to the relentless stress in our lives.

Popular attempts to manage stress have something in

common: they work because they **remove** us from the stressful situation. This approach, while sometimes necessary and usually helpful in the short run, is bound to fail eventually. We can’t stay on vacation forever. We can’t even stay in bed most mornings. Even if we could, it wouldn’t help for long.

Mindfulness—A Different Approach

For the next eight weeks we are going to ask you to take a completely different approach. Instead of struggling to change yourself and your world, you will have a chance to look closely at what happens, so closely that you see clearly, maybe for the first time, what is actually underneath all of the stress and strain. You may be surprised to find that there is no need to eliminate stress and no need to run from it. You can find peace and relaxation, stillness and silence, right in the middle of the most chaotic moment. Everything that you need to accomplish this is already here, already with you right now. It is not necessary to manufacture relaxation, import it from somewhere else, or pretend that it has already happened. A reservoir of steadiness, wisdom, confidence and strength is a natural part of you.

Mindfulness allows us to fully experience each moment as it happens. All of the techniques that you will learn during the next eight weeks will help you to remain present in each moment. This will undo the stress that comes with anxiety about the future and regret about the past. You will learn how to accept each moment, just as it is. Then you won’t need to find an escape because your moments won’t be so stressful in the first place.

Penn Program for Mindfulness
Mindfulness-Based Tools for Living



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Essential Commitments

Learning how to be mindful in each moment may be one of the most important things that you can do for yourself. This doesn't mean that it's always easy. One of the most difficult parts of this approach starts right now, at the beginning. It involves making a commitment. Change doesn't happen by reading about it in a book. You have to work at it, and that takes time and effort.

You don't have to believe in it. You just have to be willing to make the commitment that will give this approach the best chance. You will need to practice mindfulness every day for at least 40 minutes, attend the weekly classes and the all-day retreat, and most of all, be willing to take a fresh start and try something different. You have to be willing to stay with it, even during the moments when it seems difficult. If you can make this commitment and honor it for eight weeks, we are confident that you will agree that it was well worth the effort.

We know, because we've done this ourselves, as have the many thousands of others who have completed our program. We're asking you to take a chance with the most important thing that you have: the moments of your life. It's only eight weeks. The path to a different future starts right now.

The Essential Commitments

Daily Practice: 40-45 minutes

Class Attendance: eight weekly classes

All-Day Retreat

Week One Homework

Daily Mindfulness Practices

- Listen to the recorded Introduction to Mindfulness.
- Each day practice the "Guided Sitting Meditation". This recording lasts 27 minutes.
- Practice "20 Breaths" four times a day. At the end of each of the "20 Breaths", take a few moments to simply rest with the awareness of the breath. Review the instructions for this exercise using either the written summary or the recorded guided audio instructions.
- If you like, use the Daily Practice Grid to schedule and keep track of your practices.

Note for using the recordings of guided practice

- The instructions are only a guide. Trust your sense of what is right for you.
- If the spoken guidance seems unnecessary or becomes distracting, turn down the volume so that it is very soft, or even turn it off altogether and practice on your own.

OPTIONAL Readings: Full Catastrophe Living

- Introduction
- Chapter 1: You Have Only Moments to Live
- Chapter 4: Sitting Meditation: Nourishing the Domain of Being



One at a Time: The *20 Breaths* Practice

The *20 Breaths* practice helps you to create a powerful moment of stillness and silence in the middle of activity and stress. Like all mindfulness-based techniques, it requires practice and rewards patience. If you stay with it, and especially if you practice even when you think you are too busy or distracted, you are guaranteed to learn from it. You will discover for yourself that your own natural resources are never farther away than the next breath.

Here are some suggestions to make this practice work for you.

1. **Come to a “Full Stop”** at the beginning. Deliberately stop everything else that you are doing. The practice only lasts a few minutes, so give it your full attention.
2. **One breath at a time** You are really practicing 20 very short mindfulness practices. Each session only lasts for the duration of one breath, about 5 seconds or so. Every breath is different. Each one is short enough for you to devote yourself to it fully. Don't worry about what happened during the last breath, or what will come next. Don't critique your performance. See if you can bring your full attention to the breath that is alive right now. You will notice, of course, that your mind wanders into the past and future. That is not a problem; it is how you learn about mindfulness. Just don't wander away completely. Simply notice it, and gently return to the moment of breath that is here. If you completely miss one breath (or 10), don't worry. Another is about to begin.
3. **Full attention** See if you can bring all of your attention to the present moment of breath. You are bringing your full awareness to meet the breath. Each time you notice that some of your attention is elsewhere, see if you can bring that part of attention back to meet the next breath. Notice distractions, not to fight with them, but because once you notice them you will have the opportunity to undo them in the next moment. Distractions are opportunities. Once we notice them, they will show us how to return to the present moment.
4. **Let go completely** at the end of each breath. Give yourself a moment to completely relax, release, let go. Count the breath in that moment. It is easiest if you count right before you start your next inhalation.
5. **Take a fresh start** when the next breath begins. This breath is new, never before experienced. Catch it while it is fresh, right at the moment when it first arises. See if you can find that moment, the exact moment where the breath is found.
6. **Rest for at least a few moments** at the end of the practice. If you can, schedule each *20 Breaths* practice to last for five minutes. During the last minute or two, after you've finished the counting, sit and rest gently with the continuous flow of the breath. Pause for a moment after you open your eyes, sense the body and the breath, and notice the world around you.
7. **The present moment** is the only moment of your life that you can ever actually know. View this practice as a way to rediscover the moments that make up your life.



Mindfulness Practice Scheduler

Almost everyone finds it helpful to schedule their practice in advance. You might think that you will find the time easily, but you may be surprised to discover that you're always doing something. So scheduling your practices, even the briefest ones, is very helpful. You may prefer to use an electronic device, like a computer or cell phone, for scheduling. This sheet of paper is an alternative. Begin with the first day following your class for the first date column on your practice grid. (There are only six days because your weekly class counts as the practice for the seventh day!) Schedule a time for each practice everyday. Write the time that you intend to practice on the line provided. When you complete each scheduled practice you can put a check on the line provided.

Practice	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:
Guided Sitting Meditation	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____
20 Breaths (1)	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____
20 Breaths (2)	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____
20 Breaths (3)	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____
20 Breaths (4)	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____	Time:____ _____



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3930 Chestnut Street, 4th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19104
www.pennmedicine.org/mindfulness
215.615.2775

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