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# mindful

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# HOUSE AD

# HOUSE AD

## Healthy Mind, Healthy Life

**W**e all want to live healthier lives, but with the blizzard of information out there, it's hard to know exactly what to do. Well, one thing is for sure, if you take better care of your mind, you can take better care of every area of your life—and when our lives and our bodies are healthier, our minds will follow. It's a virtuous circle!

And that's what mindfulness is all about. Yes, it can sound like it's a big complicated concept, but it's actually a simple idea—doing what we can to be present where we are right now—that has a lot of different dimensions, and we explore them in these pages.

Before you jump in, you might enjoy longtime meditation teacher and author Steve Flowers' definition of mindfulness, which shows just how rich this simple idea can be.

It's the kindest thing we can do for ourselves and for others, giving everyone the room to fully be themselves.

### **BARRY BOYCE**

EDITOR IN CHIEF, MINDFUL AND MINDFUL.ORG

### **Mindfulness is:**

#### **Non-judging**

You can be accepting of yourself rather than self-critical.

#### **Moment-to-moment, here-and-now awareness**

You can actually be here rather than in some imagined future you feel anxious about.

#### **Turning toward and being with**

You can stop avoiding the thoughts and feelings that scare you and stop generating the self-criticism and shame that can be fueled by avoidance.

#### **Compassionate and open-hearted awareness**

You can extend compassion to yourself rather than condemnation.

#### **Opening to the fullness of being**

You can stop identifying with a false and limiting sense of self.

#### **Generous of spirit**

You can free yourself from the prison of self-consciousness and extend the same generosity of spirit to others that you extend to yourself.



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PHOTOGRAPH BY JOVO JOVANOVIĆ / STOCKSY UNITED





# *Relax*

*Finding more ease and  
happiness in every day*

PHOTOGRAPH BY KRISTEN CURETTE HINES / STOCKS UNITED





PHOTOGRAPH BY GILLIAN VANN / STOCKSY UNITED

## A Place of One's Own

*A firm intention and a personal touch make for a meditation spot you'll want to visit often.*

Imagine this: Your morning alarm goes off, and for a few minutes, you stay in bed, thinking about your day. You have back-to-back meetings this morning, then you have to help take your partner's car for repair, there's a proposal to finish, and you had made plans for dinner that you're now wondering if you should cancel. You'd really hoped to fit in some exercise today, but that's probably not going to happen. You can feel your mind start to whirl.

Then imagine getting up and going to your meditation cushion. You drape a wrap across your shoulders, set your timer, and...sit.

With a day ahead like yours, starting out by meditating might seem like the last thing you'd want to do. Shouldn't you just be jumping in the shower and getting out the door?

Ah, but here's the thing: Starting your day, any day but particularly one filled with busyness, with meditation, is perhaps the best way to ground and prepare yourself to deal with the world outside. (The world inside, too.) It's well documented that meditation is hugely effective at reducing stress. But it's also particularly effective at increasing

your capacity to deal with the many potential stressors in our lives.

And, really, you could meditate right in bed, at your kitchen counter, anywhere. But there's something very purposeful and grounding about having a special place to practice, a designated spot where you can take time to get your body and mind in sync. It might be a whole room dedicated to meditation and other mindful pursuits. It could be a corner in a multipurpose room. Even just a few elements that inspire you can help make any space right.

The important thing to remember is that in order to cultivate mindfulness in our lives, we first have to set an intention and build a habit. Committing to meditate regularly isn't easy. Life can feel overwhelmingly busy and distracting, and demands on our time and attention tend to spiral out of control fairly often. When it comes to sitting down with your mind, the only thing keeping you going is you. Carving out a space in your home, even if it's only a few square feet, means literally making space in your life for a regular meditation habit to thrive. You're essentially giving your intention to meditate



WHAT DO YOU NEED?

Essentials

You, and something to sit on: Whether you use a cushion or a chair, your seat should provide proper support. And don't shy away from extra support cushions and bolsters—when it comes to meditation, your body is priority number one.

Add-Ons

Some things you don't exactly need, but are mighty useful to have on hand: a timer, a glass of water, a cover-up (e.g., a sweater, shawl, or blanket) and socks.

Environment

Even if you don't dress up your space at all, you'll want to consider noise level, comfort, and temperature.

a home in the physical world. By setting an atmosphere that reflects your personality and welcomes you in, you're simply giving yourself an encouraging nudge to keep it up.

There are a few common themes when it comes to the ideal meditation space:

*There's a comfortable yet supportive place to sit.  
It's neither too hot nor too cold.  
There's a way to keep track of time.  
There is support for aches or stiff body parts.  
It's well laid out—in other words, you feel good being in this space and ready to meditate.*

After that it's really about personal taste. If candlelight makes you feel more settled, then by all means, use a candle to signal the start of your practice. Perhaps there are certain colors, aromas, or images that you particularly appreciate. Use whatever you need to make your meditation space a place you want to return to again and again—a welcoming retreat, if only for a few minutes, from the rest of your busy life.

Tip

When you wake up, instead of checking your phone, turning on the TV or radio, or making coffee, be still and ... listen. Rest your attention on one sound until it fades away, then let another sound come to you. As thoughts come into your mind, gently let them go and return to the sound. When you're ready, begin your day.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PERRY JACKSON

HOW TO MEDITATE

By following these simple steps, you can get to know yourself up close.



PRACTICE

1

Find a good spot in your home, ideally where there isn't too much clutter and is quiet. Leave the lights on or sit in natural light. If outdoors, choose a place with little distraction.

2

Use a timer for 5-45 minutes, so you don't have to worry when to stop. Many people do a session in the morning and in the evening, or one or the other. If you feel your life is busy and you have little time, doing some is better than doing none. When you get a little space and time, you can do a bit more.

3

Take good posture in a chair or on some kind of cushion on the floor. Try these pointers:

*Eyes gaze slightly downward, 4 to 6 feet in front of you. Or eyes closed.*

*Chin slightly tucked to keep your cervical spine aligned.*

*Spine follows natural curvature—upright, yet natural.*

*Sitting bones are centered and stable—not perched too far forward or spread too far back.*

*Arms parallel to the torso, palms fall naturally on the thighs.*

*Knees below hips.*

4

With your posture established, follow your breath as it goes out and as it goes in.

(It might be helpful to put more emphasis on the outbreath.) Inevitably, your attention will leave the breath and wander to other places. When you notice this, return your attention to the breath. Don't bother judging yourself or obsessing over the content of the thoughts. Just come back. You go away, you come back. That's the practice.



# TAKE YOUR MIND FOR A WALK

*Meditation can seem so meaningful and significant that it becomes a great big chore. In fact, with a slight shift in attitude, it can be as simple as walking the dog.*

BY STEVE HICKMAN

**S**o you started meditating—and you sat there on your firm new cushion that you just bought, convinced that practicing meditation was going to finally do what nothing else had. It just made sense: letting go of the seeming unending judgmental activity of your mind and dropping down into a more purposeful and balanced life of equanimity and loving-kindness. You were set. And off you went ...

*Watching the in-breath and the out-breath. Seeing thoughts arise and simply noting them arising, dropping back into the breath when you found yourself caught up in thinking. Working mindfully with difficult emotions that periodically oozed in.*

Faithfully (and a little bit hopefully), you sat and watched it all unfold, and perhaps you even noticed a little more patience, or a shift in perspective on a longtime challenge. A few of the little “appetizers” that a fledgling mindfulness practice can offer up to keep you coming back to the cushion, even when it isn’t easy. Like, when you feel the magnetic pull of a warm bed at your early morning meditation time. You begin to waver and doubt creeps in. Or you “hit the wall” and question yourself, mindfulness, and everything that seemed so clear when you started.

Questions arise. Dark clouds of doubt periodically obscure the bright light that mindful clarity promises. You find that other things seem just a bit more important than your regular formal practice. Boredom arises and time on the cushion begins to feel like it will never end. Whatever the form,

PHOTOGRAPH BY LIAM GRANT / STOCKSY UNITED





**Q&A:****How do I handle boredom while meditating?**

Don't handle it. Boredom is a natural outgrowth of resting mindfully. But it can be less annoying as you begin to see through its facade. If you can let go a little bit, not fight the boredom, and just let yourself be where you are, you might find that a natural inquisitiveness lies beneath the surface. And it can be satisfied with the simplest of experiences.

skepticism, distraction, boredom, or outright disdain will inevitably enter into the practice. And they're to be considered phenomena like any other—leaves on a stream or clouds on the horizon.

And sometimes we can do that. But sometimes we need a little help.

**Dealing with Distraction**

*"I sit down to meditate with good intentions, and then I hear music from my neighbor's apartment, or my phone vibrating, or my leg starts hurting, and I can't meditate because of all these distractions. I need to find a quieter place to practice or somehow shut out all these sounds and thoughts so I can actually focus on my breath."*

Consider the possibility that nothing is a distraction in the practice of mindfulness. What I mean is that *nothing* (no sound, thought, sensation, smell, whatever) is inherently a distraction in and of itself. They are simply phenomena that arise in meditation.

So where does distraction come in? Well, here's where you feature prominently. When that annoying sound your roommate makes as she butters her toast becomes your own obsession, you have made toast-buttering into a distraction. When you chase the tingling in your right knee with an inner struggle about how to stop it before amputation is necessary, you have left your breath and entered the distraction zone.

The liberation of mindfulness is that we can cultivate a different relationship with these co-dependent attention suckers. We can

Consider the possibility that *nothing* is a distraction in the practice of mindfulness.

come to simply note their arising in our awareness and remain steadily aware of the breath. It is only when we invest our energy—attention, thinking, analysis, struggle, etc.—in these phenomena that they become distractions.

But don't take my word for it. Try it out. The next time you meditate, see if you can take this stance of "No Distractions" and observe what happens when things arise. You know they will. After all, even when we are feeling some degree of success at keeping our attention on the breath, other stuff is arising right? The hum of traffic outside, the touch of clothing on the skin, the memory of Aunt Peg's tuna salad. It all flows by and sometimes we aren't distracted by it. There is an awareness that it's present, but we can stay on task too.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL EDMONDSON / STOCKSY UNITED

**IS MEDITATION SELF-HELP?**

The self-help genre promises a new and better version of yourself. You will be lighter, calmer, fitter, less stressed, less angry, smarter, and more prosperous. You will have achieved the New You!

A big drawback of this approach is that it operates from the outside in. And from that vantage point, we are judged to be lacking. The next step is to set up goals for how we are going to change. Then begins the program of striving to make that change.

The ingrained belief that something is wrong with us that needs to be fixed is one of the main things meditation begins to unravel. By working from the inside out, it asks us to simply spend time with ourselves and see what we

see, to quietly observe what's actually going on in our body and mind and environment. And so often what we see is that we're hard on ourselves, and that we're trying too hard.

By constantly placing carrots in front of ourselves, we rev up the very stress we're trying to free ourselves from. When life is a perpetual destination, we never take time for the journey, to simply let things happen rather than always trying to make things happen.

While the actual outcomes of meditation are largely out of our control—they're complex, and they happen organically, and in their own time—what we can control a bit more is whether we take the time to be with our own minds.





## Meditate Like You Walk the Dog

He's not the brightest flame in the canine candelabra but Cody, my golden retriever, has got charm, personality, and a goofy disposition that suits his goofy human quite well. And Cody taught me a lesson in mindfulness practice.

Have you ever felt that you are at the mercy of your mind when meditating? You're watching your breath when the mind serves up a juicy thought. Perhaps you are contemplating a Hollywood hunk's marital woes and your odds for stepping in as his next love. Maybe it's just the enticing smell of dinner simmering. Cody is bright and cheerful, and can be quite attentive, but let him catch sight of a bushy-tailed rodent and you can almost hear him exclaim "Squirrel!!!!" and he's off on the chase. That is how our minds tend to be, doglike and distractible.

So what to do? We can't change the nature of our dogs, and the same is true of our minds. They follow thoughts, especially if they are compelling, seductive, and promise an adventure, however illusory or ultimately preposterous (like a dog actually catching a squirrel).

So how about if you cultivate the neural equivalent of a retractable leash? You know those spring-

loaded devices that allow your dog to go off on little mini-adventures, investigating fascinating smells and scurrying creatures, while you continue down your chosen path. How do you do this with your mind?

Notice your mind doing what it does with playful curiosity, tolerance of its tendencies, and a sense of intention to remain where you are. Little by little, when we let go of needing our mind/dog to go anywhere in particular, we find that we stay on our path regardless. Mindfulness cultivates an allowing of the peccadilloes and idiosyncrasies of our mental activity, all the while staying on task, which is to notice.

Next time you are meditating and your mind finds its latest squirrel, watch the chase with calm abiding amusement. Trust that it will return eventually, and sooner than if you had chased after it and tried to subdue it.

### Tip

Are your thoughts racing around like a hamster trapped in a wheel? Take five deep breaths, expanding on the inbreath, slowing on the outbreath.

PHOTOGRAPH BY HEX. / STOCKSY UNITED



FIELD GUIDE TO  
URBAN MEDITATION

A few tips to keep in mind if you take meditation outside:

**Be unembarrassed and unassuming.** No need to be an exhibitionist.

**Open your eyes.** You can spend time with eyes closed, but it's good to open up to your environment visually, too.

**If someone asks what you're doing, offer a simple answer,** such as, "I'm meditating. I pay attention to my breath and my surroundings."

**Be out of others' way.** Meditating does not require being a public nuisance.

**Enjoy the show!**



PHOTOGRAPH BY LEV RUKHIN

The Illusion of Control

We are often clutching the steering wheel and pressing the buttons of our lives with all our might, carefully trying to coax a desired course. But who are we kidding? How much control do we really have, and how much energy do we invest in trying to control and contrive outcomes that we are convinced are right, or good, or imperative? And while we can chart our course and connect with an intention to move in desired directions, there are often circumstance beyond our control and all we can do is navigate them like whitewater rapids.

Life is like that. We can exert control over certain aspects, but things tend to turn out best when we don't cling too tightly. We can hold life lightly, remain clear on our intention, and then see what unfolds. Or we can cling with a

death-grip to our idea of what needs to happen and see how well THAT works out!

Take the breath as an example. Breathing is a singular activity to which we can tune in whenever we wish, and can actually control for awhile. But if we were left to be totally, consciously responsible for breathing, we would frequently botch it up and end up gasping for breath. We just can't keep up that kind of control while going about our lives. Fortunately we don't have to.

When it comes to meditation, we can try to breathe in certain ways, but that just gets us tangled up in trying to control an already perfect process that actually works best when we get out of our own way. See if you can simply let the breath breathe itself and see what can come of that soft attitude and gentle kindness of attention.

That's meditation. Pure and simple. No bells, no whistles, no steering wheels or shift levers. I highly recommend it.

We can exert some control, but things tend to turn out best when we don't cling too tightly.





PHOTOGRAPH BY MAHOO STUDIO / STOCKSY UNITED

# HOW TO LISTEN TO YOUR BODY

*Your body relays important information to you all the time. Are you listening to yours?*

BY SUSAN BAUER-WU



PRACTICE

When was the last time you noticed how your body was feeling? Not just when you have a headache or you're tired or have heartburn after that burrito you ate for lunch. But even noticing how your body is feeling right now, while you're sitting or standing or lying down? How about noticing how your body feels while you're stuck in a meeting or walking down the street or playing with your kids?

In our busy, high-tech, low-touch lives, it's easy to operate detached from our own bodies. They too easily become vessels we feed, water, and rest so they can continue to cart around our brains. We don't pay attention to the information our bodies are sending us or the effect that forces such as stress are having, until real health problem set in.

Let's take a small and simple step in the direction of paying our body the attention it's due. Consider spending just a few minutes—every day if you can—to notice your own physicality. Not to judge your body or worry about it or push it harder at the gym, but to be *in* it.

Here's an easy body-scan practice to try. It will tune you in to your body and anchor you to where you are right now. It will heighten your senses and help you achieve greater levels of relaxation. You can do it sitting in a chair or on the floor, laying down, or standing.

- 1

**Settle into a comfortable position**, so you feel supported and relaxed.
- 2

**Close your eyes if you wish** or leave them open with a soft gaze, not focusing on anything in particular.
- 3

**Rest for a few moments**, paying attention to the natural rhythm of your breathing.
- 4

**Once your body and mind are settled, bring awareness to your body** as a whole. Be aware of your body resting and being supported by the chair, mattress, or floor.
- 5

**Begin to focus your attention on different parts of your body.** You can spotlight one particular area or go through a sequence like this: toes, feet (sole, heel, top of foot), through the legs, pelvis, abdomen, lower back, upper back, chest, arms down to the fingers, shoulders, neck, different parts of the face, and head.
- 6

**For each part of the body, linger for a few moments** and notice the different sensations as you focus.
- 7

**The moment you notice that your mind has wandered**, return your attention to the part of the body you last remember.
- If you fall asleep during this practice, that's OK. When you realize you've been nodding off, take a deep breath to help you reawaken and perhaps reposition a bit. When you're ready, return your attention to the part of the body you last remember focusing on.

# *Feel*

*Exploring emotions with  
a positive frame of mind*

PHOTOGRAPH BY DENNI VAN HUIS / STOCKSY UNITED





# How Are You Feeling?

*Meditation helps us to see an emotion for what it is and choose how we want to respond.*

**S**top being so emotional! When you hear something like that, what can you really do? You can try to push down on your insides and get them to change, but that's like playing inner whack-a-mole. Whatever you push down in one place just pops up somewhere else. You work hard to calm yourself down about a snub at work only to find yourself yelling at your daughter later.

Emotions are challenging, but why would we want to stop being emotional? It's our lifeblood. It's what causes us to get up in the morning and cross the street. Even if it were desirable to get rid of them, we'd have no choice. They're part of our system of sensing and responding to the world. Without them, we'd be automatons. Music would not move us. Loss would not affect us. Nothing would bring us to tears. Nothing would make us fall down laughing.

Nevertheless, emotions can wreak havoc and spread pain throughout our lives. Sometimes it seems that an off mood can arise

out of nowhere. One minute you're fine, the next you're screaming at your spouse and have no clue how you got there. What we don't realize, however, is that feelings are the end result of a chain reaction. The ABC model of behavior, used in mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, shows this process at work.

It starts with an activating event (A) that our mind then evaluates, either rationally or irrationally, forming a belief (B), which leads to a consequence (C), such as an emotion or action taken as a result. Where you end up from that cycle influences the next situation you find yourself in, and down the rabbit hole you go. The key here is that emotions are consequences of a situation plus an interpretation.

But we often don't see the B in this equation, the interpretation that creates the belief. Why? Because we have a running commentary, a steady stream of thoughts, playing in our minds *all that time* that we barely notice. And these thoughts dictate how we end up feeling the majority of our day.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOVANA MILANKO / STOCKSY UNITED



As we meditate, we have a little space around an emotion. We can see it for what it is.

Let's see this process in action.

A: You run into a friend at the coffee shop before work. She's with other people and barely acknowledges you.

B: "Why did she just ignore me? I thought we were friends. I don't think anyone really likes me."

C: Feelings of sadness and hopelessness, bordering on depression

An hour later, at your office, already in a low mood from the coffee shop encounter:

A: Your boss calls you into her office and asks you to fix a small mistake you made.

B: "She thinks I'm bad at my job, and she's right. I don't deserve this position."

C: Deeper sadness and hopelessness

By the time your friend texts you later that day, apologizing for her behavior and explaining that she was in a tense meeting with colleagues, you've been in a depressed mood all day.

Mindfulness' strength is in helping us to see B—the thought that feeds the belief—more clearly, by giving us the room to not be so quickly reactive. As we meditate, we notice this process. We notice how the emotion feels: the pain, the guilt, the whole enchilada. What also happens, though, is that we have a little space around the emotion. We can see it for what it is.

We can also see that emotions aren't permanent; that they come in waves. Going deeper, we see complex layers. While jealousy may appear negative and undesirable, we can discover an underlying energy there that may provide fuel for inspiration and emulation. If we strip away the damaging, aggressive ingredient in the emotion, something powerful and beneficial can remain. This is what it means to tame our emotions through meditation. We see the possibility of riding their power without harming others or ourselves. We also can choose how to act, rather than be driven to act.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PHOTOGRAPHER CHRISTIAN B. / STOCKSY UNITED

## WHAT'S MAKING ME ANGRY?

*When you notice an intense feeling rising, stop and take a moment to explore what's going on inside.*



### PRACTICE

1

**First, recognize the warning signs:** a sense of frustration, quickening pulse, heat rising or a sudden surge of energy. Emotions, particularly strong ones, announce themselves as they arise.

2

**Apply steady attention on your body** by feeling the shifting sensations as you move or the subtler interior ones if you are sitting still. Resting your attention on your breathing, take a few mindful breaths, noticing the different sensations as the in-breath and the out-breath come and go in various places in your body.

3

**You don't have to do anything special.**

Just relax and trust your awareness to notice. Allow yourself to rest in that awareness. It can take some patience to stick with the unpleasant feelings, but remind yourself to come back to observing the anger with self-compassion and discover what it has to teach you.

4

**When attention steadies and you can feel the sensations of your body or your breath more clearly, ask some simple questions while resting in awareness:**

What is upsetting about this situation? What am I thinking that is worrying or frightening me? What is making me angry, sad, or disappointed right now?

5

**Practice without judging yourself** or needing to fix anything. Breathing with awareness, offer your mindful questions with a spirit of curiosity, listening gently for any response that your natural intelligence and wisdom produces in response.

Tip

Angry? Recognize what your thoughts are saying. See if you can sit with unpleasant feelings. Have self-compassion.



# RISE UP FROM DISAPPOINTMENT

*Whether you want something you can't have or you've got no clue what you want, feeling disappointed can mark the best path forward.*

BY CAROLYN GIMIAN

O

ff the coast of New Zealand, part of the Auckland's chain, is an island called Disappointment. So many shipwrecks occurred here that the New Zealand government set up depots, stocked with food, clothing, and tools for the use of castaways waiting to be rescued. It turns out that the disappointment of being shipwrecked, which I imagine would be considerable, was survivable if one had provisions.

And therein, of course, lies a lesson: If we have the provisions to deal with disappointment, it's workable. Indeed it's a universal human experience. So finding ways to work with our disappointment seems not just important but necessary.

## Not Getting What You Want

One of the most common sources of disappointment is not getting something that you want in life. It might be as small as not finding your favorite brand of peanut butter at the store or not getting the gift you had really wanted for your birthday.

It could be much bigger: Not getting a promotion you'd hoped for at work, not getting into the college of your choice, not winning an election, or being turned down when you propose marriage.

Closely related to not getting what you want is getting what you don't want. Nobody wants a flat tire; nobody wants to get stomach flu. Nobody wants to flunk out of school, get cancer, or get arrested.

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTIAN RICHTER / STOCKSY UNITED





## CONTEMPLATION

## Bring Your Disappointment with You

Even the midst of disappointment, quiet and openness can ease the suffering.

*If you have a few minutes*  
Breathe through your disappointment. Take it in and let it out. Just stopping to notice the breath for a minute can make a big difference.

*If you have an hour*  
You could spend that time meditating, or you might go for a walk or bike ride. See what happens when you give yourself some space.

*If you have more time*  
Set aside an afternoon or a whole day to practice with your disappointment. One thing that might surprise you is that, if you sit long enough with it, you might get bored with your thoughts and reactions to it. What's that about?

*Any time*  
Be kind to yourself. There's a difference between you and whatever you're experiencing. Appreciate yourself and your bravery: You are there with it. It's OK that you're disappointed. Give yourself a break.

Feelings of disappointment may have shades of anger, sadness, emptiness, or dejection. You might take a stiff upper lip approach to your disappointment, but it will probably be a quivering lip.

If you book a venue for a lecture or a concert, and the room is only half full, you might say, "That was a disappointing turnout." And someone might say back to you, "What did you expect?" That doesn't mean they're asking you literally what you expected, but they're telling you that you had unrealistic expectations. It could mean you didn't do enough to publicize the event, so you should have expected poor attendance.

There's a strong relationship between expectations and disappointment. Expectations may arise in the present, but they tend to be future oriented—they set us up for disappointments to come. It may be helpful to look at how our thoughts of the past, the present, and the future relate to expectation and disappointment.

When we look more closely at disappointment, we can see how much we judge both ourselves and others when things don't go our way. Expectations set us up for disappointment. Blame compounds our disappointments. You can see this in the littlest blames and judgments: You make a reservation for dinner, but when you get to

the restaurant, they can't find your reservation and there are no tables available. Somebody has to pay!

With many smaller disappointments, humor is a good salve. Really, is there nothing you can put on your burrito to replace the brand of hot sauce you just ran out of? Isn't it even a little bit amusing that you're so fixated?

A disappointing vacation, one that didn't turn out well, may become the source of hilarity later. In our family, we laugh about a series of "death marches"—hikes that went horribly wrong. When one of these events happens to you, in the present, can you see even a glimmer of funniness in it?

Daily disappointment is often connected with the breakdown of a habitual pattern. When you can't follow a daily routine or habit, it's irritating—and that irritation is a particular kind of disappointment that we all know. If you've been wearing the same brand and style of sneaker for the last 10 years,

Humor can be  
a good salve.  
A disappointing  
vacation may  
become the source  
of hilarity later on.



PHOTOGRAPH BY SUZANNE CLEMENTS / STOCKSY UNITED

and suddenly, it's no longer being made, yes, it's disappointing. But not getting what you're accustomed to also wakes you up. You have to look around and see what else is available. You may not want to have a different drink at the coffee shop. Half awake, you just want to put in your order and get your cup of Joe. But when they stop carrying your favorite dark roast, you have to look at the menu and consider the alternatives. Disappointment can be very refreshing.

## Tip

When things are bad, try saying this to yourself: *This is a moment of suffering; Suffering is part of life; May I be kind to myself; May I give myself the compassion I need.*



## Getting What You Want

What about the disappointment that comes from getting what you want? What could be the problem with inheriting \$1 million, getting engaged to your true love, signing a book contract, winning an election, or fulfilling any dream you have? More mundanely: You want a bagel. You get a bagel. What's disappointing about that? But we keep raising the bar. What we think will satisfy us today may not satisfy us at all tomorrow.

In the story of the Fisherman and His Wife, a poor fisherman

catches a magic fish that implores the fisherman to save him in exchange for fulfilling a wish. The fisherman can't think of anything he wants, so he throws the fish back and goes home. When his wife hears the story, she has lots of ideas. They could use a loaf of bread, since they have nothing to eat. The fish grants this wish, but the wife soon wants a nice house, to replace their hovel. Then she wants a mansion, then she wants to be a queen in a palace, and finally she wants to make the sun rise and the moon set. Essentially she wants to be God. You can imagine what

happens next. The fish says no way, and she is very disappointed.

The wish-fulfilling fish disappears, and the fisherman and his wife are back in their shack. Like so many fables, this one touches on real life desires. There's nothing wrong with improving your life, but unfortunately, we are often unable to appreciate what we are given or achieve. We may find ourselves disappointed over and over again as our appetites increase.

When the great thing we longed for doesn't live up to our expectations, we may wonder why we wanted it in the first place. That word expectation again! Buyer's remorse occurs, in part, because the purchased item doesn't bring the hoped-for satisfaction. Getting what you want is also a source of disappointment because we can't anticipate the unexpected consequences in life. There are often media stories about those who are miserable after winning the lottery. They are unprepared for people who try to scam them and for the reactions of friends and relatives who want a piece of the winnings. And while there may be a tremendous thrill to winning an election, politicians are exposed to myriad difficulties once they're in office. Many successful celebrities commit suicide quite possibly because they're not prepared for the challenges and disappointments that come with success.

Another consequence of getting what you want is worrying that you'll lose what you have. Bad investments, the volatility of the stock markets, and all such vicissitudes of life provide lots of room for the joys of disappointment!

PHOTOGRAPH BY SARAH LALONE / STOCKSY UNITED

## CONTEMPLATION

### Working With Your Expectations

At different times, you may be more preoccupied with what happened earlier, what's happening now, or what you think and hope is going to happen. Give yourself some time to notice your thoughts and how they shape your expectations. The point here is not to manipulate your thoughts but to become more aware of them. This exercise is about observing and understanding expectations and disappointment.

#### The Overall Approach

During a session of meditation or at another quiet time, pay attention to all these thoughts of the past, the present, or the future. Here are some suggestions for how to do that:

1. When you have thoughts about the past, does this set up expectations for the future? For example, if you had a fight with your son or daughter this morning before they left for school, are you anticipating what will happen when they come home tonight?
2. What are you expecting to happen in the future, whether it's later today, this week, or this year? Will you be disappointed if these expectations aren't met? If your partner always gets you a great gift for Christmas, do you anticipate what you'll get

next year? Do you worry about whether you'll find the right gift for him or her?

3. When you have thoughts about what's happening now, are there expectations attached to that? Present-oriented thoughts are often based on observation. How do expectations come out of your observations? Think about a messy room in your house, filled with stuff that you and others have left there. Can you just observe that in your mind? Can you separate the observation from the plan you make to clean up? Or you might look out the window and be surprised that it's just starting to snow. Is there a moment of appreciation, when you see those first few flakes falling, before you wonder whether you have a snow shovel anywhere around?

4. Although we all have lots of thoughts and expectations that preoccupy us, we rarely give ourselves space to see these thoughts and emotions and explore them without judging or trying to change them. What do you learn from looking without judgment?



## Not Knowing What You Want

And then there's the dissatisfaction of not being sure whether you want the fish or the steak or the tofu on the menu—the ongoing disappointment that arises from not being certain what you want at all. Anything you choose means that you don't choose something else. As we've all heard, when one door closes, another opens, but we often worry about the door that's about to shut. We don't want to make the wrong choice. The very fact of having to make a choice somehow disappoints us at a fundamental level. Why can't the thing just come to us served on a silver platter?

Yet, in the long run, the funny thing about having to choose, to make up our mind, is that even the choices that don't seem to work out well for us have the potential for personal growth. People often speak of how adversity has fueled positive changes in their lives. The value of disappointment is often easier to perceive in retrospect. Five years after you don't get your dream job, you may find yourself in a very successful career you never expected. However, at the moment when we're dealing directly with major setbacks or challenges, we need to find the strength that allows us to face disappointment without losing heart.

When we feel fundamentally disappointed, it can be paralyzing. We heap blame onto ourselves and we may blame the people we live and work with, especially our loved ones. This judgmental approach is expressed in a phrase like, "I'm so disappointed in you!" Ouch! Or

we say to ourselves, "Man, I really messed up." We feel like giving up on ourselves. We're unworthy or unable to achieve anything. We feel not just disappointed but discouraged, which literally means to lose our courage.

When things really don't go our way, how do we find the courage to not give up? An early mindful perspective comes from Henry David Thoreau, who wrote in his journal in 1838: "If we will be quiet and ready enough, we shall find compensation in every disappointment." Or as we might rephrase this: *Through the quiet of mindfulness practice and being open enough, we can find benefit in every disappointment.*

Disappointment isn't something we can avoid in life, but it doesn't have to be crippling. If we have even a glimmer that our failures are as valuable as our successes, we have the beginnings of a way to work with disappointment. The unacceptable alternative is to give up. It's far more damaging to shut down, to avoid taking a chance in life, avoiding anything risky, committed, or uncertain. Martin Luther King wrote: "There can be no deep disappointment where there is not great love."

Starting with an appreciation of ourselves and growing in our empathy for others, let us champion love over apathy. Let's take a chance! Let's risk disappointment! We can celebrate that we have the courage to experience both disappointment, or failure, and satisfaction, or success.



PHOTOGRAPH BY MILLES STUDIO / STOCKSY UNITED

## The Science of Optimism

Being guarded and careful might seem like a safer strategy, but maintaining an upbeat, positive frame of mind may extend your life. A growing body of research signals that being optimistic can cut your risk of developing dementia by half, help you recover faster from surgery, and reduces your risk of death from major disease.

Researchers speculate that optimism's power is twofold. First, optimistic people tend to make healthier lifestyle choices. Second, a glass-half-full outlook supports better coping mechanisms. Optimists, it turns out, roll with the punches better, and that in turn equals lower stress levels. Stress is known risk factor for numerous health conditions and has been indicated as a possible contributor to dementia.

The best news of all? Optimism can be cultivated.





PHOTOGRAPH BY BLUE COLLECTORS / STOCKSY UNITED

## BREATHING THROUGH THE HARSH JUDGMENTS

*This common mindfulness practice is a powerful and convenient way to undermine negative mind-chatter that causes us undue pain.*



### PRACTICE

1

**Take a seat where you are right now,** in a posture that feels comfortable, wakeful and alert.

2

**Bring attention to your breathing at your belly** and notice the breath coming and going. If you

like, place your hand there to feel the rise and fall. Make this rising and falling the center of your attention and let the breath come and go as it will, in its own way and at its own pace. It knows how to “breathe you” and you can let it do what it does without trying to change it in any way. If your mind wanders, simply return to it again to feeling the belly’s movement, using the sensation as your way to be present, here and now in each successive moment for at least the next five minutes.

3

**You will soon notice that the mind is not all that interested in following the breath.**

You have to bring it back again and again. Take notice of the judgments arising.: *I can’t do this. This is stupid. I’ll never be able to meditate.* No need to enter into a conversation with them, just return to the sensation of the breath. By simply noticing the judgment you can quickly see through it—it’s just a fleeting thought.

This is how you gradually, breath by breath, undermine the power of harsh judgment: “Just another judgment, back to the breath.” It works with any kind of self-judgment. Simply notice and with as much kindness as possible, begin again.

### Tip

**If we ignore what bothers us, it bothers us more. Don’t be afraid to take stock of your own heart and mind.**



# *Play*

*A celebration of movement,  
spontaneity, and changing  
your vantage point*

PHOTOGRAPH BY EVA PLEVIER / STOCKSY UNITED







## A Moment of Awe

*A simple walk through the woods can connect us to something much bigger than ourselves.*

BY BARRY BOYCE

Each day as I come home from work, I walk on a tree-lined street that's like a small forest. Some days I'm utterly lost in thought, but when possible I try to drink it all in. It's so much more nourishing than looking at a screen. If I had to choose between a tree and a newsfeed—including a newsfeed about beautiful trees—I would choose the tree. Every time.

A friend of mine is an arborist who has long exposed me, on excursion after excursion in parks and wilderness, to the wonders of trees and forests, first in Pennsylvania and now in California. Whenever we enter the land of trees, almost instantly the mood changes. There is a palpable slowing down of thought and speech. You can hear more, and better. You begin to sense with more of your body, and there is even a preternatural settledness that can easily overtake you. Some psychologists now consider this complex of mental and bodily experiences to be an emotion, which they call awe, and it's considered restorative. The forest is Awe Central.

In his magical book, *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate, Discoveries from a Secret World*, author and forester

Peter Wohlleben—who worked for the German forestry commission for decades before overseeing his own Beech woodland and working for the return of primeval forests—unfolds, in one compact chapter after another, the story of why trees are so magnificent and why they affect us. First off, trees are living creatures—not inert objects merely decorating our world. They live, breathe, eat, sleep, make mistakes and learn, communicate, cooperate, and compete, as they ceaselessly reach for light and water.

One of the profound ways being amid trees affects us is through the time scale. Youth for many trees starts at 150; old age can be 500 or more. When you spend time around something existing in those kinds of time frames, it can alter your perspective, so focused as it is on the next minute, hour, day, week, year. Perhaps this offers one reason that a study cited by Wohlleben showed that time spent in the forest lowers blood pressure. And Japanese researchers found after an eight year study that spending time among trees improves immune function, lowers stress, and reduces hostility and depression.

Trees also show us how deeply entrained community is in our surroundings. They network and communicate with each other by exploiting a vast underground system of fungi, warning other trees of dangers and opportunities. Some trees, like aspens, are really not a group of separate entities. They are one organism, and when, in a strong wind, a whole grove of aspens shivers and shimmers as one, it can overtake you with awe.

Perhaps the greatest features of these large organisms that we share our world with is that their power and grace and talent—and indeed their “technology”—can help us reduce our obsession with being the center of everything and expose the folly and selfishness of short-term thinking. They allow us to feel that—as part of a much greater whole—we are both small and large. And while our individual time on Earth is short, our actions ripple through time, and as a human community, our life is very, very long.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEREMY PAWLOWSKI / STOCKSY UNITED



# RISE UP, TUNE IN

A short yet powerful yoga practice to wake the body and steady the mind.

BY KAITLIN QUISTGAARD



PRACTICE

A short moving meditation can be a gentle way to welcome a new day or rebalance yourself anytime throughout the afternoon.

1

**Stand with feet hip-width apart, toes straight ahead.** Take a moment to stretch in any way that feels good—arms overhead, leaning to each side, or swinging your arms in a gentle twist.

2

**Return to relaxed standing with arms at your sides and eyes closed.** Notice your breath and simply follow it as it moves in and out. How are you feeling? Tired or sleepy? Agitated? Consumed by emotion? Hungry? Note the feelings, without judgment. After several breaths, open your eyes and begin to move.

3

**Inhale** and sweep arms skyward until your fingers touch. **Exhale** sweeping arms out and back down as you fold gently at the waist, as if bending to touch your toes. Let your hands come to rest on your knees or shins. **Inhale** and stretch the crown of your head forward, letting your spine elongate parallel to the ground. **Exhale** and gently fold your torso toward your legs and let your arms and head hang. Your knees can be slightly bent. **Inhale** sweeping your arms out and overhead as you gently come back to standing. Exhale and lower your arms, bringing hands to “prayer position” at your chest. Then let them relax down to your sides. Take a full breath, in and out. If you like, close your eyes and take another.

4

**Once you've completed this Half Sun Salutation, start again:** Sweeping your arms up on the inhalation, folding over on the exhalation, reaching forward on the inhalation, folding in on the exhalation, rolling up on the inhalation, standing on the exhalation, and taking a full breath. Then do it again.

After just three of these, you may want to stop and check in. Has some of the tension in your shoulders and neck eased? Has your thinking mind quieted down as it focuses on the movement? Is your breathing a little deeper, slower, smoother? How are you are feeling now—differently from before you began?

5

**If you're enjoying the experience and its effects, you could try a series of 10.** Eyes open or closed, you can flow through the postures incredibly slowly, aware of each micro-movement, or quickly, to invigorate body and mind.

6

**Finish your practice standing, eyes closed, gently smiling, keeping your awareness on your breath.**

Tailor the practice to your needs each day, asking What practice would feel good in this moment? Don't be too demanding. Don't force yourself to stretch more or move faster than feels good. If last week, you touched your ankles and today you can only reach your knees, just note the difference. This is a perfect moment to practice compassion for yourself.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MILLES STUDIO / STOCKSY UNITED







PHOTOGRAPH BY MAURO GRIGOLLO / STOCKSY UNITED

# WINTER BLAHS SLOWING YOU DOWN?

*It may be cold or gray, but the right attitude  
can keep you moving all year long.*

BY CARA BRADLEY

It's easier to feel motivated when the sun is shining and warm weather beacons. But as summer turns to fall turns to winter and then to spring, most of us require greater motivation to get out the door to exercise. But it's the best thing for you, especially as the days grow shorter. Research shows that diminished sunlight can cause levels of serotonin (the feel-good hormone) to drop, exacerbating low motivation even as we feel more tired and hungry. And being sedentary can trigger feelings of depression and isolation.

If you'd rather stay in bed or just curl up on the couch after work, you need to push a little bit to take the first (and second and third) steps. Like a coach, a positive attitude and a bit of self-discipline can give you the "go get 'em" encouragement to stay in the game. Here are a few tactics to help keep you—and your attitude—light and bright.

## Start Small and Build

Exercising consistently can be challenging. If you're ready to take on an active lifestyle, remember that you don't need to run a marathon tomorrow. You don't even need to run. Start with a daily walk. Be steady. It's better to do something active every day—even if it is just a little bit—than nothing at all. Consistent exercise builds momentum, and that builds on itself. At some point, your workout will become a habit and you won't have to think about it as much. Over time, with commitment and consistency, you'll increase your laps in the pool, the speed of your walk, and the weight you use for squats. You keep building from wherever you are.



Set an Intention

As you start, take a moment to set a clear intention, which can be like a compass: It directs your mind, keeping you motivated and focused. Strong intentions will bring about strong results. Here are a few examples of powerful intentions:

- I'm going for a run to clear my head.*
- During this yoga class, I will be kind to myself.*
- On my walk, I'll let these prickly thoughts fly away.*
- I'm going swimming to increase my strength.*
- I won't judge myself during this weight-training class.*
- May this hike in the woods bring me peace of mind.*

Listen to Your Body

Your body speaks to you in the language of sensation. The problem is that we're often stuck in our heads and don't hear when our body asks us to change what we're doing. Start paying attention to the coolness, heat, tingling, or throbbing you feel when you exercise. Doing so will help you tune in to when you need to modify, hold steady, or pick up the intensity.

During your next vigorous workout, notice the sensations: your muscles burning toward the end of your walk or run, the sense of expansion during a deep yoga pose, or the fire in your legs during those last few squats. Your body is getting stronger. There's also the sensation that is not so sweet: It can be a sharp pain or, conversely, numbness. These are signals that you're overtaxing your body and need to back off or modify what you are doing. To know the difference, you'll need to pay attention. While it can be empowering to push past our limitations, it's equally important to be mindful of them.

Be Kind, Light, and Non-Judgy

Nike has been telling us for a few decades to "Just Do It." We could add, "But be nice about it." You don't have to beat yourself up to get moving every day. Try talking to yourself as a supportive soccer coach would talk to a first-grader. Maintain a cheerful "You've got this" attitude, and give yourself a pat on the back when your workout is over.

Being too serious about exercising takes the joy out of movement. If you can keep your sense of humor about the whole thing, you may find yourself going longer and harder. Laugh at your mistakes. Pause to take in the view. Cheer yourself on: "I think I can, I think I can." Be flexible with your schedule. While exercising daily sounds good, schedules can change on a dime. The last thing you need is to get stressed about exercising. The goal is to be consistent, not a slave to your workout schedule.

Your body feels different from day to day. Some days you may rock and roll, other days you may only crawl. Acknowledge your highs and lows. If you can, commit to moving a little bit. This is how you build consistency and momentum. Negative self-talk will just drain your energy. Start where you are. Let go of what you can't do. Embrace what you can.

Savor the Post-Exercise Glow

Remember how amazing you felt the last time you hit the gym or took a hike in the woods? How clear and calm you felt after your last yoga class? Exercise can settle your mind. It can make you feel refreshed from head to toe. It helps to dissolve tension in places you may not have realized were tense. You want to remember this feeling. The next time you exercise, pause for a few minutes afterward. Sit down or lie down to fully savor the post-exercise glow. It may be all you need to get yourself on the track tomorrow.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BONNINSTUDIO / STOCKSY UNITED



Q&A:

Does running or other focused activity provide the same benefits as sitting meditation?

Vigorous physical activity clearly brings benefits. Doing it with greater mindfulness not only enhances the activity itself—running, biking, swimming—but also can help sharpen our awareness and decrease our panic response anytime we're in the heat of the moment. Stationary meditation, though, is the best foundation for extending mindfulness and awareness into other areas of our life. It's the place where we can take the time to settle, become familiar with the texture of our mind, and learn to absorb our fears with equanimity and let go of our fixations. Then what develops during sitting meditation naturally spills over into the rest of our life—including mindful movement.



## Welcome Stress

Your body gets used to moving at a certain level. After a few months of consistently walking three miles, it takes less energy and effort. But you won't get stronger if you keep walking the same distance at the same speed. This is where stress comes in: It's not only good but essential for getting fit and healthy. We build strength, endurance, and agility by incrementally adding resistance, repetition, or duration. Muscles grow stronger when they're repeatedly challenged at their maximum capacity, causing the thin strands of muscle fiber to tear. In the day or two following this stress, the muscle fibers repair themselves by binding back together in a way that enables them to handle a heavier load. We grow stronger by stressing a system and letting it adapt to be able to handle a higher capacity.

## Calm the Body, Calm the Mind

Have you ever noticed that when your body feels tired, it's hard to focus? When your body feels tense, there's a good chance your mind feels tense, too. The state of your body reflects the state of your mind. A good walk clears away the mental cobwebs. A well-paced run can settle an agitated mood. Flying down a wide-open stretch of road on a bicycle can lift a heavy heart. Moving your body stirs stuff up and shakes things out in a way that nothing else can. Energize your body, and you'll energize your mind. Calm your body, and you'll calm your mind.



PHOTOGRAPH BY BISUAL STUDIO / STOCKSY UNITED

## KEEP MOVING

### Find a buddy

Make a commitment to exercise with a friend or coworker once or twice per week. It helps to choose someone you wouldn't want to disappoint. This will hold you accountable and improve the likelihood of staying consistent. Besides, working out with a friend makes sweating more fun.

### Crank the Tunes

In a 2013 study, researchers showed that pumping up the music while exercising significantly improves mood. Listening to inspiring tunes also distracts you from fatigue and motivates you to work out longer and harder. Plug in, tune in, and turn it up.

### Prepare

To maintain your routine, plan ahead. On Sunday evening, grab your calendar and schedule your daily workouts for the week. Add all possible types of exercise, including walking the dog, trips to the gym, and dancing with friends. Plan your ideal schedule in detail, then hold that schedule lightly. As we know, sick kids and jammed traffic easily get in the way of best-laid plans.

### Get Outside

It's often said that if you need to solve a problem, go out for a walk. Get some fresh air, clear your mind, and you're likely to return home with your answer.

### Keep It Bright

If you can't get outside, then turn up the lights. Research shows exercising under bright lights lifts mood, especially in the winter months when daylight hours are limited. Gyms are great for keeping the floods on. If you exercise at home, be sure to head for the brightest room in the house.

### Sign Up for a Class

Find a yoga or rock-climbing class—or hit the dance floor. Make your workout social, and you're more likely to have fun and stay motivated.

# WHY SO CURIOUS?

*Curiosity killed the cat. Or did it? Research suggests it keeps us—and other animals—sharp.*

BY SHARON BEGLEY



Is actor Kirk Douglas alive or dead? When did Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman get divorced? What’s U2 frontman Bono’s real name? Unless you’re a close personal friend of any of these celebrities, knowing the answer has no meaningful effect on your life—yet if you’re anything like the office full of people I tried this on you’re at least a little itchy to whip out your phone or dash over to your computer for answers. There’s even a website (or two... or three... ) devoted entirely to informing you which famous people have shuffled off this mortal coil.

Curiosity. It has “its own reason for existing,” physicist Albert Einstein wrote, and is, according to 18th-century English writer Samuel Johnson, “the first passion and the last.” We all know what killed the cat, so perhaps 17th-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes was right when he called curiosity “the lust of the mind”—since in a lustful state we (and perhaps felines?) toss self-preservation to the winds. But considering how common curiosity is, scientists who study the mind are only beginning to fathom where it comes from, what it’s good for, and what happens when we have a lot or not much of it.

Although there are tantalizing hints to all these questions, definitive answers remain elusive, which is... curious. “Curiosity is a basic component of human nature,” said Benjamin Hayden, an assistant professor of brain and cognitive sciences at the University of Rochester. “Just think of how much time we spend browsing the Internet, reading, or just gossiping. Nature seems to have endowed us with a desire for information that’s so strong it operates even when it doesn’t help us go out and hunt down a woolly mammoth.”

PHOTOGRAPH BY DUET POSTSCRIPTUM / STOCKSY UNITED





## HABIT-CHANGERS

If your daily life feels a bit meh, one way to spark interest is to seek out new situations and experiences, inviting a different perspective.

### 1. Take an unfamiliar route to work,

or to a regular appointment. Change your mode of transport—if you usually drive, take the bus, or train, or walk.

### 2. Follow a new recipe

using at least one ingredient you've never cooked with before.

### 3. Start a conversation with someone you don't usually talk with.

Ask them how their day is going and be prepared to listen with interest.

### 4. Go to the cinema without checking what films are showing.

Watch the first one that starts after your arrival.

### 5. Read a different newspaper/newssite—

perhaps one that doesn't confirm your usual political views.

This need to know propels children to look under rocks and behind curtains, dogs to sniff a stranger, busy people to look up answers to trivia questions. In many cases curiosity is not in service of our basic needs for food, reproduction, and overall survival. That's all evolution supposedly cares about. So how can curiosity be such a central, unshakeable mental trait that it is wired into primate brains by eons of evolution? When lab monkeys are given a choice between two games, each of which has a 50-50 chance of winning them a sip of juice, they prefer the game where they learn whether they won or lost immediately, thus instantly satisfying their curiosity, even when the actual payoff (juice) arrives no sooner. "The monkeys' choice of an option that immediately resolves uncertainty suggests how strong the drive is to satisfy curiosity," Hayden said. Monkeys are even willing to pay for that: They'll give up 25% of the promised juice reward if they can learn immediately whether or not it's coming. As Hayden and his Rochester colleague, Celeste Kidd, explained in a 2015 paper in *Neuron*, "Monkeys choose information even when it has a measurable cost." Pigeons, too, will pay to satisfy their curiosity, giving up one-third of a promised food reward if it will buy them information, a 2010 study found.

People behave much the same. Study after study shows we are willing to pay for answers to trivia questions right now even though we could have looked up the answers

for free later. Trivia information "is demonstrably useless," Hayden said. Yet we're wired to want it anyway: Brain regions that become active when contemplating the arrival of a reward are also active when people feel curiosity. "We're just starting to open up the brain with neuroimaging and see where curiosity is happening," Hayden said, "but the fact that it's associated with reward circuits supports the idea that curiosity makes us anticipate a reward," satisfying our cognitive hunger.

With its deep evolutionary roots, curiosity can be so compulsive it makes us binge-watch Netflix, and feel anxious and deprived if one of our favorite shows is cancelled before all the plotlines are resolved. Such a strong drive, some biologists believe, must have benefits. Otherwise evolution would have snuffed it out, especially since too much curiosity, or misplaced curiosity, can be deadly (I wonder what these wild mushrooms taste like?). "The perils of curiosity suggest it must have some real, and important,

Just as hunger makes us search for food, so the feeling that there's a hole in your store of knowledge drives the search for information.

PHOTOGRAPH BY CAMERON ZEGERS / STOCKSY UNITED



## Tip

Get curious! What really matters to you in life? What do you believe in? What brings you the most joy or lights you up?





PHOTOGRAPH BY NASOS ZOVILIS / STOCKSY UNITED

survival benefits to balance out risks,” said Hayden. “We think curiosity activates learning systems in the brain.”

That jibes with what the founder of American psychology, William James, proposed in 1899: that curiosity is “the impulse toward better cognition.” That idea has stood the test of time. The best way to understand curiosity, cognitive scientists believe, is as the mental analogue of physical hunger: Just as the feeling of an empty stomach drives the search for food (good for survival), so the feeling that there is a growling hole in your store of knowledge drives the search for information. This feeling of cognitive deprivation, and the attendant urge to sate that intellectual hunger, is “associated with persistence and solving problems,” German and American researchers reported in a 2013 study in the *Journal of Individual Differences*.

That may be why the most curious children are the best learners. A 2011 review of about 200 individual studies concluded that, although intelligence is the strongest predictor of academic success, curiosity plus effort “rival the influence of intelligence,” scientists in Britain and Switzerland wrote in *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. “A ‘hungry mind,’” they concluded, “is a core determinant of individual differences in academic achievement.”

The link between curiosity and learning persists well into adulthood. In a 2015 study, scientists had younger adults (average age: 20) and older adults (average age: 73) read 60 trivia questions such as, “what product is second, only to oil, in terms of the largest trade volumes in the world?” and “what was

the first nation to give women the right to vote?” Everyone rated how curious they were about the answer, which they were given. Curiosity had a substantial effect on how likely the older adults (but not the younger) were to recall the answers a week later, psychologist Alan Castel of the University of California, Los Angeles, and colleagues reported in *Psychology and Aging*.

And about that dead cat: Research suggests curiosity can keep us young. A 1996 study of 2,153 70-ish men and women found that the more curious they were, in general as well as when presented with questions, the more likely they were to be alive in five years. It was the first study to identify curiosity as a predictor of longevity.

How might one stir up curiosity, and boost not only memory but longevity? Since curiosity reflects cognitive deprivation, the analogy to physical hunger applies: “A small amount of information whets the appetite for more,” said Hayden. So sample lots of what information sources have to offer and let your curiosity run wild.

Oh, and if you’re curious about the answers: The researchers posit that coffee is the second-most widely traded global commodity and New Zealand led the way in women’s suffrage. If you’re wondering about those celebrities I mentioned, indulge your curiosity. It’s good for you.

### Tip

Focus on what’s right in front of you: work, play, the people you love, the problems of the day. Life works better when you show up for it with your whole mind and body.



# Going Rogue: Guidelines for Aimless Wandering

*When we allow ourselves to be a bit spacious, it's also a way to be present.*

BY BARRY BOYCE

**M**indfulness altogether contains mindfulness and awareness. Awareness is kind of a larger thing—You are aware of everything that's around without it having to be about you. Through the practice of aimless wandering, instead of focus and concentration, you emphasize spaciousness: You're walking around, you loosen the focus on yourself—you give yourself an opportunity to refresh your mind and life by just starting to notice things, going toward them and enjoying and appreciating them.

Ready to try it for yourself? Here are some tips to get started.

## Time

If you can devote a long stretch of time, like a whole afternoon, and use the sun's path through the sky as your timepiece, that's great. If you have less time, set a timer. Even in airplane mode, a phone's alarm will go off. Fitness trackers also have vibrating alarms you can use.

## Destination

No set destination. When you reach crossroads and forks in the road, choose your way randomly (a mental coinflip) or follow what you're drawn toward. In the wild, even if you are on a hiking trail you can still do a kind of wandering. It takes the form of venturing off the path a bit at points or simply stopping to admire and savor. The key is to have time and space that is not all about getting somewhere or getting something done.

## Interaction

How much interaction you have is up to you. If you want it to be a completely quiet contemplative time, you can avoid getting into conversations. If bumping into people and seeing what they're all about is part of your wandering, that's fine too. What will defeat the spirit of wandering, though, is interacting with people at a distance, i.e., through phone calls or texts. Make your wandering a digital-free zone.

## Precautions

If you are wandering in the wild, it's not a great idea to be all by yourself (remember that guy who fell into a crack in the rocks and had to cut his arm off?). Also, educate yourself about any local dangers, such as disease-bearing ticks and excitable wild animals, and take the precautions recommended by authorities. If you're in a complicated wild area or an unfamiliar city, be sure to have a map to save you if you truly get lost. Of course, you can rely on your GPS at that point, but a physical map is nice (yes, they still exist) because you can see the big picture better.

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHALIT SAPHAPHAK / STOCKSY UNITED



### Tip

Throughout your walk, stop occasionally and tune into your senses. What do you smell, hear, see, taste, and feel? Paying attention to these things can help you experience the natural world more fully.



# *Discover*

*Work + technology and how not to get  
caught up in the speed of doing.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY LUKE LIABLE / STOCKSY UNITED





PHOTOGRAPH BY STUDIO FIRMA / STOCKSY UNITED

# The Richness of Everyday Life

*Want more from life? Appreciate what you've already got—and share it.*

BY MICHAEL CARROLL

**B**efore you read on, pause and consider your circumstances. Chances are you're in a comfortable, safe setting, with access to virtually unlimited resources. You can travel freely, communicate globally, and explore the entirety of human knowledge unrestrained. And you likely have ready access to friends, colleagues, family, and neighbors. Most of us are endowed with unprecedented resources never before experienced throughout human history.

Yet, there's a strange irony to our circumstances. Despite such remarkable prosperity, too many of us find ourselves increasingly depressed, anxious, and unhappy.

So while those of us living and working in developed countries are profoundly prosperous with resources unimaginable to the billions of humans who came before us, we are, nonetheless, increasingly dissatisfied.

Why? And what can we do about it?

In his study of cognitive mind wandering, Matthew Killingsworth documented what may be the source of the problem. Essentially,

his research found that we spend about 50% of our time thinking about something other than what we're doing.

And when our minds wander from our immediate experience, what we *imagine* is almost always more distressful than the *actual experience* we're having. In essence, we spend a lot of our time ignoring our prosperous circumstances while giving birth to the very distress we're seeking to avoid.

This is where mindfulness-awareness meditation comes in. One of its core effects is that we become utterly familiar with our immediate experience. Whether tragic or triumphant; exquisite or horrifying; painful or pleasurable, meditation allows us to savor life as a lived experience rather than a mental rehearsal of thoughts, ambitions, hopes, and fears. And it's here in our willingness to open to life that we can realize our profound prosperity—not as an economic fact but as a remarkable lived experience.

We can also attune ourselves to the prosperity all around us with these simple practices:





### Marvel at devices

Too often we treat technology as a bothersome intruder or a diversion. Or we take wonders like lightbulbs, toilets, and airplanes for granted. Instead, pause and consider the sheer human brilliance that brought us such powerful devices. Marvel at our modern-day experience rather than being numbed by it.

### Express gratitude

Gratitude is a skillful way to dismantle the impulsiveness of a wandering mind. Here, we deliberately pause throughout the day, to be grateful for a glass of water, a loving friend, a colleague, a blue sky, a working traffic light, a breeze—the list is endless.

### Delight in others' joy

Whether it's a child smiling with her mother, a fellow worker making a breakthrough, or teenagers playing soccer, there is much human joy to witness and appreciate.

### Remember the scope of human suffering

Human despair is vast and unrelenting. Recalling that so many are without prosperity and permitting our hearts to break while lending a hand is a noble way to savor our good fortune.

### Share what you have

Current economic theory is fast concluding that successful “prosperous” societies will be less about accumulating wealth, growing income, or amassing consumables, and more about relieving human suffering, inspiring creativity, and offering solutions to problems. Such an awakening comes as no surprise to mindfulness practitioners: All we have to do is pause and witness our good fortune, and then sharing such prosperity with others just comes naturally.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHELA RAVASIO / STOCKSY UNITED

# ADDICTED TO DOING

*Always going but never feel like you've finished? Try lowering your speed limit.*

BY JACQUELINE CARTER AND RASMUS HOUGAARD



Perhaps you're familiar with this experience: After a long week of work, the weekend finally arrives. It's time to wind down, relax, and do nothing. But before 9am on Saturday, you've made three social engagements, ordered a new closet, and set in motion other plans that will keep you busy the entire time. Come Monday, you drag yourself out of bed, feeling like you didn't even have a weekend.

This is an example of action addiction, a deep-rooted human condition fueled by the neurotransmitter dopamine. Released in the brain in anticipation of reward (a fun plan with friends, an organized closet), it provides a temporary sense of enjoyment, relaxation, and gratification. Then, the brain craves another kick. More actions ensue. And over time we are caught in a vicious circle of action and reward.

The consequence of constantly chasing the feel-good effects of short-term rewards, however, is losing sight of larger goals. Creating deliberate pauses in your day will help you slow down—and actually get more done.

1

**Set a timer to notify you each hour to take a 45-second break.**

2

**When you get the notification, stop what you're doing.** Let go of the thoughts you are having, and direct your attention to your breath.

3

**At the first breath cycle, relax your body and mind.** At the second, focus your attention. At the third, ask yourself, “What am I doing right now: Am I just spinning my wheels or am I focusing my energy on something important?”

That's it. After your break, chances are you'll feel calmer and more focused.

Tip

**Disconnect for one day.**  
**Be open to other ways of finding out information and connecting with others and the world.**



# IS YOUR LIFE DESIGNED FOR YOU?

*Waiting and hoping for a “perfect” opportunity won’t get you any closer to the life you want. Start creating that life from where you are right now.*

BY HUGH DELEHANTY



It was just lunch, Dave Evans told himself. Just a conversation. Evans was a tall, smooth-talking Silicon Valley jack-of-all-trades with a resume that included heading up the team that designed Apple’s first mouse and cofounding the video game giant Electronic Arts. Lately, he’d been teaching a popular course at the University of California, Berkeley, on navigating life after college, and was wondering if his friend Bill Burnett, the executive director of Stanford’s Design Program, would be interested in doing something similar there.

A thoughtful, no-nonsense design geek, Burnett had a similarly wide-ranging portfolio. As an undergraduate at Stanford, he’d gotten swept up in the human-centered design movement, a holistic, interdisciplinary approach to engineering that had revolutionized product design in the ’70s. Over the course of his career, he’d created award-winning designs for Apple’s Powerbook and the original Star Wars action figures, as well as helping launch several successful tech startups.

What emerged in the months that followed was a new way of thinking about life and work. The fundamental question that Bill and Dave wanted to address was: How do you build a life that works for you? And it turned out that their offbeat approach to design thinking was a surprisingly useful model for attacking this question.

That became clear in the summer of 2007, when they rolled out their prototype to a group of Stanford design students. The course was a hit, and a few years later, the university asked Bill and Dave to create an expanded version that would be open to all juniors and seniors, not just design students. That class, one of the most popular electives at Stanford, has spawned a broad range of product-line extensions, including workshops and online classes for the general public and the New York Times #1 best-selling book, *Designing Your Life*.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BONNINSTUDIO / STOCKSY UNITED





## LISTEN FOR IT

Mindfulness can easily be thought of as a retreat from dealing with real issues. But asking yourself what's actually happening in most situations may be your best move yet.

BY JEREMY HUNTER

## Scenario:

Things get hot in a discussion, and emotions take over

## Response:

If you ask yourself, “What outcome do I truly want here?” you may be able to see your true aim more clearly and defuse the excess emotion that may be getting in the way. It's not about doing away with passion and emotion; it's about assessing how to spend the precious resource of your—and everyone else's—mental energy.

At first, I was skeptical. Ever since I was a teenager, I've been a how-to junkie, yearning in vain to find that one ineluctable truth that was going to change my life forever. I've dabbled in all kinds of self-help workshops over the years, and after reading the works of everyone from Epictetus to Marcel Proust to Brené Brown, I doubted that a couple of Silicon Valley engineers, no matter how savvy, had anything new to offer on the subject. But I soon discovered, after meeting Evans and Burnett, that they weren't interested in philosophizing. Their program is a practical blend of mindfulness, self-compassion, and creativity.

In essence, design thinking is about building your way forward by creating ideas and testing them in the real world. It's a way of “sneaking up on the future,” explains Evans, adding that it works particularly well in situations where you don't have a lot of hard data to rely on.

The starting point is exploring who you are and what you want to do with your life. Many of us assume that there's only one right answer to that question, but once you start looking at your life with a designer's point of view, a multitude of creative possibilities emerge. “Life is not a problem to be solved,” says Burnett. “It's an adventure to be engaged.”

That's particularly true in the shape-shifting world we live in today. “The only job we all know we're going to need someday is the job of getting the next job,” Evans says. “You could make the argument that life design is what life is. We're all designing our life all the time.”

All of this sounded fine for twentysomethings making their way into the workforce for the first time. But what about the rest of us? Would Bill and Dave's life and vocational “wayfinding,” as they called it, work for someone stuck in a stifling mid-career job? Or, in my case, someone who had held big jobs in the media industry but was now searching for creative ways to find fulfillment in the next phase of my life?

That was the question tugging at me as I walked onto the set of Bill and Dave's online workshop at the CreativeLive studios in San Francisco. To kick things off, Burnett proposed that it was time to reframe the age-old question: What do you want to do when you grow up? The real issue, he said, was: What do you want to grow into next?

In Burnett's view, one of the most common obstacles people face trying to make that leap is the widespread “dysfunctional belief” that once you find your “true passion,” everything else will magically fall into place. But research by Stanford's Center for Adolescence shows that only 20% of people age 18 to 26 have a clear vision of what they want to accomplish in life and why. For most of us, Burnett observed, “Passion is an end-product. You discover passion by working hard on something. If you have a passion, that's great. But this passion thing leaves eight out of 10 people out of the conversation.”

Another motivation killer is the idea that if you haven't figured out your life by a certain point in time, you're already too late. “That's ridiculous,” said Burnett, explaining that several longitudinal studies show that most people don't fully

form their adult self until 35 or even 40. “And after that,” he added, “you get to reinvent that self over and over again.”

In the days leading up to the workshop, Bill and Dave had asked us to compose two short statements on how we viewed work and our philosophy of life. The idea was to get a sense of how strong the connection was between what we believed and what we did for a living.

Reading my statements aloud to my tablemates, I could immediately hear the discordance between them. My work statement sounded old, like something I might have written in a resume 20 years ago. It focused primarily on personal achievement and “using my gifts as a writer, producer, and artist to raise awareness and inspire positive personal and social change.” Those were worthwhile goals that had fueled important changes in my life. But what mattered to me now was helping others expand their awareness in a more direct way.

As I wrote in my life statement, “My dream is to align my inner values with the way I operate in the



PHOTOGRAPH BY ELLIE BAGULOV / STOCKSY UNITED

Most people don't form their adult self until 35 or 40—after that, you get to reinvent that self over and over again.





PHOTOGRAPH BY IVAN GENER / STOCKSY UNITED

world. To be genuine and authentic, to be compassionate to those who are suffering, to act and make choices based on the knowledge that we are all part of something larger.”

That felt right, but how to turn such lofty aspirations into action?

Bill and Dave had a simple answer: Build a prototype. Or, rather, several prototypes of the new life you want to live. That led to a thought-provoking exercise called “odyssey planning.” It involved imagining three dream scenarios and drawing a timeline of how each would play out over the next five years. The first one, Evans suggested, should be based on what we were currently doing, the second on what we’d most likely do if that option came to an end, and the third on what you’d love to do if time and money were no object.

Why three scenarios instead of one? Because it stimulates creativity and cross-pollination. In a recent study, researchers at Stanford’s Graduate School of Education looked at two groups: one that started with three ideas and came up with two others en route to their final goal, and another that began with one idea and later produced four others. Even though both teams eventually wound up with five ideas in total, the researchers found that the three-idea group generated solutions that were far more creative. “Designers have known this all along,” Evans and Burnett write in their book. “You don’t want to start with just one idea, or you’re likely to get stuck with it.”

These exercises generated a lot of buzz at our table. Louise talked excitedly about her first two scenarios: partnering with a digital dating company to produce

blockbuster events and launching a media company focusing on creativity. But her eyes really lit up when she rolled her third big idea: becoming a broadcaster who interviewed famous creative people on TV. “I love doing this,” she said, “because you don’t have to rock everything in your life. All you have to do is experiment.”

Matt had a similar revelation. His “wild and crazy” idea was to build a surfer retreat/mindfulness center in Mexico for people to escape from their cell phones and recharge. “I feel most myself when I’m helping others,” he said. “Real kindness puts a new spin on life.”

As for me, I imagined 1) expanding my work as a journalist and consultant, 2) training to become a meditation teacher and/or executive coach, and 3) writing a historical novel and painting my masterpiece. These weren’t big, hairy, audacious ideas, but, taken together, they seemed to make sense. Which, according to Burnett, is usually how it works. Most life design students don’t drop everything and go chasing after their most outrageous idea, he said. They continue doing what they’re doing, but enrich the experience with ideas from the other scenarios. The point, said Evans, was “getting more out of life rather than cramming more into it.”

The next step was testing the ideas in the real world. That meant having “prototype conversations” with people who are already living the life you’ve imagined for yourself. No matter how ludicrous your idea, said Evans, there’s usually someone out there doing the thing you want to do.

## LISTEN FOR IT

**Scenario:**  
Distraction  
keeps you from  
accomplishing  
important things

**Response:**  
When you have that feeling of being lost, you can inquire, “Where is the most important place for my focus and energy to be right now?” To help promote deep focus, try creating a 90-minute block on your calendar that is your untouchable focus time.





How do you turn lofty aspirations into action? Build a prototype.

The trick is to focus on your interviewee's personal story rather than hitting him or her up for the job. "Everybody loves to tell their own story," said Burnett, especially if you don't pull out your resume in the middle of the conversation. Another proviso: Cast a wide net. It's better to over-report the story than to try to make important decisions about your future based on skimpy information. Plus, if you engage in enough conversations, one of them might even turn into a job offer.

What about procrastination? "The number one thing we see that holds people up is fear," said Burnett. "But fear is one of the things we know how to master. You take very small steps over and over. That's what we call 'failure immunity.'"

A case in point is Kathy Davies, the managing director of the Stanford Life Design Lab. "My tendency used to be, 'I'm going to revamp everything and make a New Year's resolution for the whole

year,'" she said. "The problem is that doesn't work because you're intimidated from the start and you've bitten off more than you can chew. That's why I love the idea of micro-changes. When we do product design, we follow people around and see what they do and then design products for them. To give yourself the same kind of scrutiny is a smart thing because it yields interesting information you can use to make small changes. The beauty is, one, you notice things about yourself that you weren't paying attention to before and, two, the idea of making a small change is very empowering."

This kind of self-exploration is not just a gambit; it's the heart of the process. As Evans and Burnett describe in their book, designing your life involves starting with who you are, having lots of ideas and trying things out, and then making the best choices you can. As you do that, they write, "you grow various aspects of your personality and identity that are nurtured and called upon by those experiences—you become more yourself. In this way you energize a very productive cycle of growth, naturally evolving from being, to doing, to becoming. Then it all repeats as the more-like-you version of you (your new being) takes the next step of doing, and so it goes."

When you approach life this way, they add, "Failure is just the raw material of success. We all screw up; we all have weaknesses; we all have growing pains. And we all have at least one story in us of an occasion when we've reframed a particular failure, where we've changed our perspective, and have

seen how a failure turned out to be the best thing that ever happened."

The secret of good decision-making, according to Evans, is engaging your whole being in the process, not just your cognitive side. "People often say, 'I want to make a really good decision, not an emotional one,'" he said. "But there's no such thing as an unemotional decision."

The problem, according to neuroscientists, is that the emotional wisdom center of the brain isn't directly linked to the part of the frontal lobe connected with language. And, because we place such a high value on rationality in our culture, we don't spend a lot of time developing our discernment of those feelings. "The thing that you think of as yourself," said Evans, "is heavily shaped by your emotional wisdom. If you can combine your EQ and IQ, you will make better decisions."

This doesn't happen overnight. One of the best ways to cultivate emotional intelligence and other forms of intuitive knowing is to engage regularly in meditation, yoga, art-making, and other practices. And it's important to make it a regular habit, quipped Evans, "not just something you do once, like going to Disneyland."

Tapping into your imagination also helps. Toward the end of the workshop, Bill and Dave asked us each to select one of our life scenarios and write about what it would be like to live that story. I was surprised by how easily the words flowed, and the same was true for virtually everyone else in the room. That was an example of "the EQ-IQ combo" in action, said Evans. Because of all the work we'd done earlier in the workshop, he

## LISTEN FOR IT

**Scenario:**  
You take over too much

**Response:**  
This is a prescription for burning yourself out while undermining others' opportunities to learn and become empowered. You need to ask, "Why am I really doing this? Does 'helping' make me feel important?"

You may come to see that you're less overwhelmed and the team is more capable when you delegate authority to others.

PHOTOGRAPH BY CATHERINE MACBRIDE / STOCKSY UNITED



## LISTEN FOR IT

## Scenario:

You regularly interrupt people

## Response:

Oops! There goes that hair trigger again. See if you can use your bodily senses as an early warning system to interrupt hasty outbursts. Ask yourself, "What happens in my body the moment before I interject?" See if you can step back and ride out the impulse to interrupt.

explained, the emotional reality of our story was available to our unconscious mind and our conscious verbal mind was happy to write it down.

During the discussion afterward, my tablemate, Diane, had an interesting insight. She said that "putting the narrative out there—even though it didn't exist—made it feel as if it was really happening." That was the whole point, said Burnett. "It's not good enough just to have an idea," he said. "You have to put that idea in the future and make people want it. And the more authentic it is, the more people will want to help you."

After the workshop ended, one question still puzzled me: How does life design evolve as we get older? When I called Evans a few weeks later looking for an answer, he suggested (not surprisingly) reframing the question: "Do you mean: At what age do you notice that people don't care about their life anymore and are just waiting to die? We just haven't noticed that. Everybody thinks their life matters."

In general, he said, he found it much easier to work with people who'd had some life experience because they appreciated the restraints a lived reality includes and held their plans with a little more looseness. But, he added, older people sometimes get blocked because of their overly well-developed identities. "They've been doing the same career for 30 years and they're scared of becoming a different version of themselves," he said. "And they're pretty convinced that the world isn't going to let them. Twenty-year-olds don't have that problem."

"Be present. Be here physically and mentally. Because that's where it's happening."

—Dave Evans

Evans told the story of his sister who decided to get her PhD at age 59, even though she already had a full-time job as dean of a graduate school. The program would take six years of intense work, and she worried that she wouldn't have the energy to complete it. But her husband helped her reframe the problem, saying, "Those six years are going to go by anyway. It's just a question of whether at the end you'd like to be a person who has a doctorate."

"That's why reframing is such a big deal," said Evans. "Are you framing what you're asking of yourself in the most generative, open-minded way possible? Because that's the context in which you want to make the decision. To give yourself the best possible chance of having things work out."

As he related this story, I was reminded of the sign at Stanford's design school that reads You Are Here with a big arrow pointing at the floor. "That's where we're coming from," said Kathy Davies. "You are here. Be present. Be here physically and mentally. Because that's where it's happening."

PHOTOGRAPH BY RAYMOND FORBES LLC / STOCKSY UNITED







PHOTOGRAPH BY STUDIO FIRMA / STOCKSY UNITED

# TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR TECH HABITS

*Commonsense strategies for keeping digital devices from ruling your life.*



PRACTICE

## Challenge

## Strategies

### Information overload

A flood of data, info, news, gossip, messages, humor, and requests can overwhelm us and make us spend more time online than we want.

In the information blizzard, it's not possible to keep up. Accept that. Choose your sources wisely, budget the time you spend there, and when you feel your mind tiring, move on.

### Constant distraction

You're so caught up in checking and responding to email messages, texts, and phone calls that you have too little focused quiet time.

Come back to your body, to doing one thing at a time and knowing why you're doing it. Plan times and situations when you connect and times to unplug. Stick with the plan.

### Friends, partners stuck on devices

The people you want to spend time with are too busy spending time with people who aren't there.

It may seem petty, but it's essential to agree on when it's acceptable for each of you to be on your devices and when it's not. And with partners, it's key to have times when you're unplugged together.

### Children spending too much time staring at screens

You can never get your children's attention because they're always absorbed in texting, social media, or web surfing.

Accept your children's digital life, take a strong interest in it, talk about it. Then, it's a shared thing. You're also in a better position to impose limits to screen time and social media habits, if you need to.



# Nourish

*Eating healthfully, savoring everything*







## Mind Over Meal

*Restrictive diets and food fads are not the way to good nutrition. A healthy dose of attention is what's called for instead.*

BY MARK BERTIN, MD

**H**ow much do we love food? A lot, right? And not surprising, since we are quite simply designed to find pleasure from it. But we can get to liking it so much that we eat way more than we need, or we might get bored with it and not pay attention anymore. Newspaper in hand, spoon in mouth; one hand on steering wheel, the other holding a muffin; laptop revved up, Facebook at the ready, sandwich mid-air—is there anything that illustrates mindless behavior more than our habits around eating?

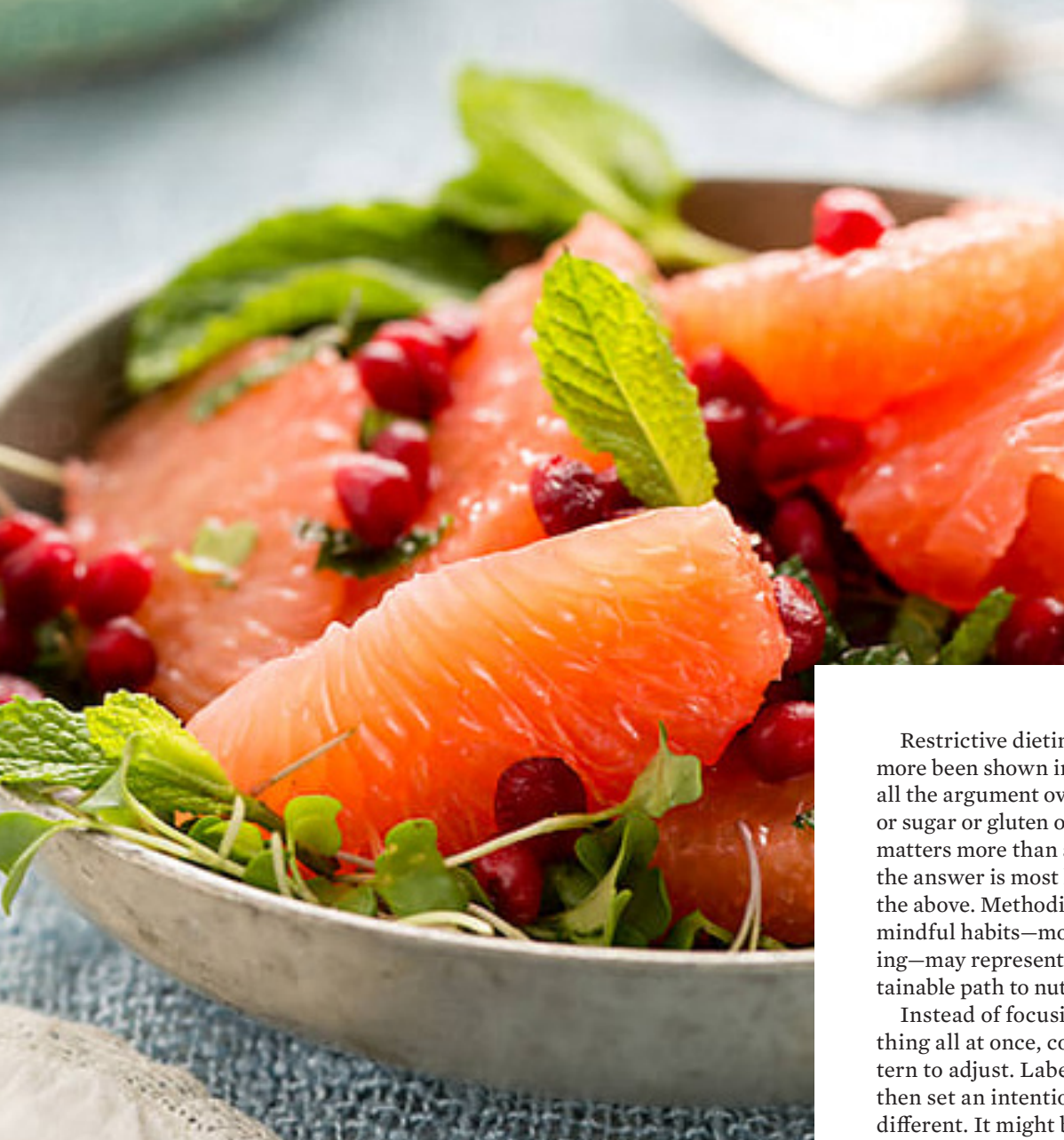
Instead of so often eating with our mind somewhere else, why not flip things around and use everything surrounding food as an opportunity to expand mindfulness? Most of us find that if we're asked to go on a short fast, perhaps before having a medical test, we can pull it off. In a moment, without all that much stress, our nutritional habits drop away. We have no choice: I'm hungry, but I'm going to wait. It's uncomfortable, and challenging, but doable—proof that it is really, really hard to change how and when we eat, but not impossible.

That's mindfulness in a nutshell. Aware of annoyance or stress, we accept what's unpleasant. We choose to refrain. And then when it's time to end the fast, we eat, and suddenly we notice, enjoy, and savor every bite as if it matters.

Decades of nutrition research come down to one consistent suggestion: The healthiest path is to follow the principles that underlie the traditional Mediterranean Diet, which emphasizes vegetables (not fried) and olive oil (over butter) and moderate consumption of protein (and seafood more than meat). As Michael Pollan, author of *Food Rules*, says, "Eat food, not too much, mostly plants." Not that radical, only different from what's normal in many people's lives. If you and your family and your social circle have deeply held preferences (a bacon cheeseburger followed by German chocolate cake, say), changing eating habits may seem insurmountable, but even little steps matter. And with children, a well-rounded diet from the start is a whole lot easier than trying to break entrenched eating habits later.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MAJA TOPCAGIC / STOCKSY UNITED





Mindful habits—more than dieting—may represent the most sustainable path to nutritional health.

Restrictive dieting has more and more been shown ineffective. For all the argument over whether fat or sugar or gluten or anything at all matters more than anything else, the answer is most likely none of the above. Methodically revised, mindful habits—more than dieting—may represent the most sustainable path to nutritional health.

Instead of focusing on everything all at once, consider one pattern to adjust. Label it “habit,” and then set an intention for something different. It might be personal: Instead of fries, I’ll order salads. It may relate to emotion: I always crave cookies when I’m upset; I’ll skip them next time. It could be for your family: I think I’ll stop keeping chips around the house. Start small, and expand gradually.

Pause—take a few breaths, drink some water, or whatever else interrupts the momentum—before making food choices. Try putting down your utensil between bites and consciously deciding when to take another one. Stay aware when you’re cooking, rather than being absorbed in worries and plans. And skip giving yourself a hard time. Instead, use the everyday experiences of preparing food and eating to build your capacity for giving life the full attention it deserves.

# Eat, Drink, Be Mindful

*Knowing what your body is truly craving, and honoring that wisdom, makes meal time far more satisfying.*

BY JEAN KRISTELLER

It’s late afternoon and you’re tired, hungry, and have had a stressful day. The chips (or cookies or left-over take-out) are right there, calling to you, but before you indulge, see if you can bring mindful awareness to the moment.

**First, bring your awareness to your breath.** Slow down by taking two or three deeper breaths. You can close your eyes if you want. Tune your awareness into what is leading you to want to eat. Are you physically hungry? How hungry? How do you know that? Or are you just stressed—or bored—or perhaps you just got home and saw a box of crackers left out on the counter? There might be several triggers to your urge. Simply notice what they are.

If you are physically hungry, give yourself full permission to have a snack.

## **Choose your snack mindfully.**

Consider what is calling you. What would be satisfying? What would you enjoy—to help you relax, bring comfort, or hold you over until dinner? Do you want something sweet, something crispy, something savory? Are the crackers still calling you, perhaps with a little cheese? Or do you really want some ice cream? Give some thought to this, because you will be more satisfied and less likely to eat more than if you’d just grabbed the first thing in front of you.

## **Use outer wisdom to consider how much to eat.**

One good rule is to eat about 100 calories per hour to sustain you until the next time you eat. That’s about how much your body will burn during that time, and it is a way to give yourself permission to simply enjoy your snack, rather than feeling guilty about it. So if the crackers are calling you, and there are two hours until dinnertime, figure out about how many crackers would equal about 200 calories. Or put the crackers away and help yourself to a small dish of ice cream.

## **Combine with inner wisdom.**

Savor the food, eating it slowly and without doing anything else. Pay attention to enjoying the food, to the pleasurable signals your mouth and taste buds are sending you. You’ll be surprised how satisfied you are from a smaller amount of food, both because you are fully paying attention (rather than also opening the mail or leafing through a magazine) and because you are giving yourself permission to enjoy this small amount of food.

**Be flexible.** Another day or another time you may want to try different techniques. Be curious and self-accepting. Bring these practices to other snack times, then gradually into meal times. Explore how the quality of your experiences of food and eating shift when you bring a mindful, accepting, and open awareness to them.

## **Tip**

When you eat lunch, just eat lunch. No devices, no multitasking. Then return to what you were doing.

PHOTOGRAPH BY NICOLE S. YOUNG / STOCKSY UNITED



# GET REAL WITH EVERYTHING

*Borrowed from the practice of mindful eating, savoring broadens the experience of all that comes our way.*

BY BARRY BOYCE

T

he word “savoring” crops up a lot in instructions for mindful eating, but why stop there? Inspired by that notion, I recently decided to challenge myself to a week of savoring things. As I started out, I began to see that I was automatically leaving lots of things out—things that were, well, unsavory—so the challenge had to undergo some immediate reengineering. It would have to become about savoring

*everything.* Yikes.

That immediately led me to the understanding that if I was going to savor the unsavory I would have to be thankful somehow for whatever came my way. I would have to embrace the artificially sweetened (but still valuable) “attitude of gratitude.” It was a bit of a revelation. What I was prepared for was taking time to really enjoy things, in the present moment. What I wasn’t prepared for was how much it would challenge underlying attitudes and assumptions.

When the week was over, I came to some conclusions about how savoring can reach into every area of life.

## 1. When things are good, savor the joy.

When things are good, it should be easy to savor them. In fact, that was not my experience. It took more effort to savor something I already appreciated than I would have imagined.

On my walk to work, it was easy to savor the air and the light coming through the trees and to imagine the pleasure of slowly seeing the seasons change.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARLON RICHARDSON / STOCKSY UNITED





Tip

Next time you're waiting around, try standing meditation. Notice how the soles of your feet feel... your toes...your heel. Relax your whole body and let your feet connect you to the earth.

But I noticed just how focused I still was on getting there. If I were driving, I would have hit the gas, but when you're walking and you accelerate, you feel it. And that's when the moment of joy came: in the sudden realization that the body is always in the present, no matter where my thoughts take me, and I can always return to that.

## 2. When it's every kind of bad, savor the resilience.

When we were married my wife and I joined a “crystal club” at a department store. That's the kind of thing newlyweds did 35 years ago. We scrimped and saved until we had a complete set. One Saturday recently we came home from food shopping to discover the shattered remains of our crystal glasses scattered on the floor. The shelf holding them had collapsed.

It hurt, but they're only things. We can get real attached to things, but usually the pain passes after a little while and our resilience bounces us back.

On the other hand, I find that some of the hassles we encounter getting through the day can actually have a greater impact on our psyche than we realize. Like when my bank made me come back three times to try to resolve a problem with my ATM card. After hours invested, the end result was “Your account is too old to allow that function.” *What! I hate this bank. I hate all banks.*

When things go haywire, the “why me?” voice can easily take over. But, why not me?

In the end, though, irritation with hassles is just that, irritation and impatience. In the grand scheme of things, the hassles amount to next to nothing. Bouncing back from hassles becomes easier when we snap out of the fixed notion that things are just supposed to go our way.

The big challenge comes with the really hard stuff to bounce back from: ongoing pain and loss. The death of my father, my brother, my mother, the pains in various parts of my body that just won't go away. These things do not respond to having a smiley face plastered on them. They want their due. They exact their toll. I find it hard to contemplate what to be thankful for on this score, what to savor. In a good moment, though, I can glimpse the fact that pain, whether physical or emotional, is something that lets us know we are alive. And as we try to manage it as best we can, we are humbled, we are vulnerable, we seek help. We find a way. We bounce back.

## 3. When it's boring, savor the freedom.

In my own hometown and when I'm travelling, I try as much as possible to use public transportation. It's a good way to feel connected to other people, and when you're above ground it's a good way to see a place. But I'm not good at waiting. I can't tell you how many times I've thought, “This bus is never coming.”

I've come to realize, though, that when I'm waiting or doing something mundane like waiting for a bus or washing dishes, I am trying to avoid being bored; of

having nothing to occupy my mind and afraid that something is going to bubble up from in there to make me unsettled. It's extremely typical in meditation: you end up waiting for the session to end and trying to calculate how soon that's going to come because you're having trouble handling the boredom.

But as I keep discovering (again and again) in meditation, I don't need to keep myself occupied with a lot of extra thoughts. It's peaceful to take a break from that.

My savoring challenge helped me to savor the freedom from the need to entertain myself every minute of the day. I can just let my mind be.



PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMES ROSS / STOCKSY UNITED





PHOTOGRAPH BY LEAH FLORES / STOCKSY UNITED

Bouncing back from hassles becomes easier when we snap out of the fixed notion that things are just supposed to go our way.

#### 4. When it's crazy, savor the laughter.

Sometimes things just get totally out of hand. One fall weekend some friends were visiting and the weather reports were saying that a hurricane was going to come through. I said to them, “Don’t worry, they always say that, but hurricanes don’t really come this far north with any real force.”

We woke up the next morning to find three-story-high trees uprooted, power lines down, water everywhere... And once I could make my way out of my neighborhood, after a day or two, I went to check on my office. The hurricane had ripped the roof off the building where my top-floor office was. As I gazed through the former ceiling at the sky, I looked at a dripping wet computer and a collection of waterlogged books, carpets, and furniture.

When things go haywire, the “why me?” voice can easily take over. But, I’m starting to really appreciate the antidote to this, shared by a meditation teacher friend: “Why not me?”

Then you can have a good laugh at the absurdity of trying so hard to keep it together in a world that is beyond your control.

#### 5. When you complete something, savor the reward.

My work, like so many people’s work, involves creating one thing after another after another. It’s unending. You’re in the middle of one thing and you can’t help but think about the next thing that’s looming.

So, when a piece of writing is done, when an issue is finished, when a book sees the light of day, I always make sure to take a moment to pause, to celebrate with teammates and friends and family, to raise a toast, to wear the laurel wreath, to take in the accolades—just for a little while—and then move on, not dwelling there.

A next thing will come along, but that pause to acknowledge and refresh ensures that work doesn’t simply become one damn thing after another.

### LIFE’S MOST THANKLESS TASK REVISITED

When you see the benefits of doing dishes with your full attention, you’ll start volunteering to scrub those pots and pans.

BY SHAMASH ALDINA

**1. First, just look.** How dirty are the dishes? What colors and shapes do you see? Now move into your body. How does your physical body feel standing at the sink?

**2. Note any emotions—** are you annoyed, dreading, happy? What thoughts are running through your mind: *When I finish this, then I can relax ... This is stupid ... something else?*

**3. Begin cleaning, slowly.** Feel the warmth of the water. Notice the bubbles forming and the rainbow reflections in the light. Watch how a dirty dish is transformed into a spotless, sparkling one. (Go ahead, admire your work!)

**4. Try to wash each dish as if for the first time.** Keep letting go of the anticipation of finishing the job or the other things you could be doing.

**5. When you’re done, look again.** Notice what you’ve accomplished. Might you feel a bit refreshed, too?



## 6. When you're with others, savor the companionship.

I have twin granddaughters who live far away, and one of our favorite topics of conversation is their friends. They each can easily name three friends from their class, with relish. It's such a delight to watch how children make friends. They sort of sniff each other out and start tentatively to do a little something together and then before too long they want to spend every day together. Few things are more poignant than that moment when one child asks another, "Do you want to be my friend?"

Neuroscientists in recent years have been talking about "brain coupling," whereby two people become so in sync while communicating with each other that they are like one brain. I'm sure we have all felt that with a friend. The sheer joy of a shared laugh. The moments of listening when you need to be heard. The shoulder to cry on. Someone to share ups and downs, without caring which it is.

I'm blessed with friends all over the world, people I can connect with within minutes no matter how long it's been. Other human beings... what's not to savor?

## 7. When you're alone, savor the space.

As wonderful as friends and companions and lovers can be, in some sense, no one can really know what goes on in your mind. You can tell them. You can leave hints. They can intuit. But complete knowledge of our inner workings is just something that is off limits to others. And that can make us very lonely sometimes. *No one gets me. No one feels what I feel. No one is in here with me.*

And yet, in the right doses, being by ourselves can be deeply restorative. It can help us discover a deep reservoir of contentment that does not need to be chased after. We can find a vast inner space where we are free from the need to talk, where poetry and creativity and compassion come from. It's a place where the emotion of awe resides.

That kind of space—a space of awe and wonder and simplicity—may be the most savory treat of all.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BLUE COLLECTORS / STOCKSY UNITED







# Thanks For This

*Gratitude isn't just in our head: It takes root in the heart and the senses, for one beautiful moment...and then another.*

BY ELAINE SMOOKLER

The breaking day was shimmering with the buzz of nature going about its business. Breathing in, I felt awakened by the delicate bite of the early spring air. Breathing out, I felt my breath rise like a morning prayer. There was nothing special going on, only gently bubbling stillness and beauty all around. A moment of peace. I felt grateful to be present and noticing.

What does it mean to be grateful? Thankfully, it doesn't mean convincing yourself of some bogus notion that everything's fine and dandy. Living your life with gratitude means choosing to focus on what you appreciate. The goal is not to block out difficulties, but to approach those difficulties from a different perspective. Appreciation softens us. It soothes our turbulent minds by connecting us with the wonderfully ordinary things, great and small, that we might otherwise take for granted.

Try it for yourself. Think of anything in your life that you can feel thankful for: that driver who yielded when you realized you were in the wrong lane, the fact that the sun rose this morning, any quality in yourself that you admire. When you're thankful, how does your body respond? Is there a sense of lightness? Tingling? Warmth? In what way does expressing gratitude change your outlook? Might there be a connection between gratitude and happiness?

Gratitude can help us see that not everything is terrible—not all the time, anyway. Practicing gratitude can keep our hearts open to the tenderness in our daily experiences. There are so many things to be grateful for. Take trees, for example. They freely provide fruit and shelter and even offer themselves as climbing gyms! The wild kingdoms of plants and animals are exuberant, colorful, and extravagant. We are surrounded by abundance and yet mindlessly whirl into automatic pilot, losing sight of life's nourishing wonders.

The same is true of people. Have you ever picked up someone else's socks, or stayed late at the office to help out, or held a door open for a stranger, or let someone else have the remote? When no one bothers to thank you, how does it feel? And who do you fail to thank? Remember: Offering our appreciation to one another is a powerful way to strengthen and even repair emotional bonds. Try it. It's free.

As we cultivate greater appreciation for what's around us, we can include being thankful for what's inside of us. We can delight in and feel grateful for our own unique talents and strengths. Perhaps you have a knack for making people laugh, or for being an astute listener. Or maybe you can thank yourself for just getting out of bed and making it through the day. We can be grateful that we have a heart, a mind, and the wisdom to

know how to live with kindness and compassion.

When you begin to turn more frequently toward the things you appreciate, the world increasingly opens to reveal that there is always some small thing for which you can be grateful.

Here are some simple gratitude tips that you can try right now:

**1. Say "thank you!"** Who doesn't want to be appreciated for their efforts? Saying thanks can be a gift, and one that feels pretty good, too!

**2. When you're feeling low,** take a moment and write down some things that spark gratitude in you, like:

*The pleasure of the spring sun  
A stirring piece of music or art  
A delicious or nutritious meal  
A child's laughter, a stranger's sweet smile, a shared moment of joy.*

**3. Describe in as much detail** as possible how your body feels when you express gratitude. Which emotions accompany these bubbly feelings? What thoughts do you notice?

PHOTOGRAPH BY LAURA STOLFI / STOCKSY UNITED



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PHOTOGRAPH BY LAURA STOLFI / STOCKSY UNITED





## LIVE REGRET-FREE

Regrets? We've had a few. But which ones will really stick with us? Let's turn that question around: What can we do differently in our lives right now that will lead to fewer regrets later on?

In *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying*, palliative care nurse Bronnie Ware, shares the most common regrets voiced by patients they looked back on their lives.

*I wish I'd been brave enough to express my feelings.*

*I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true  
to myself, not the life others expected.*

*I wish I stayed in touch with my friends.*

*I wish I hadn't worked so hard.*

*I wish I let myself be happier.*





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