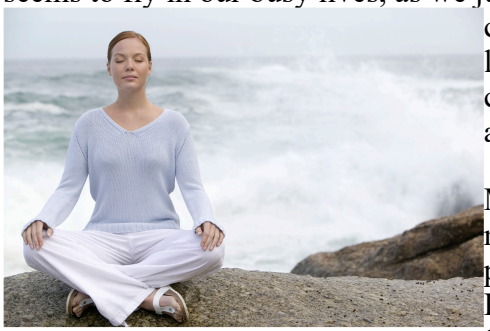
Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Be mindful – not mind full: five steps to improve your mental health

“Where did the time go?” This is a common question nearly all of us have thought at some point. Time seems to fly in our busy lives, as we juggle demanding jobs, parenting responsibilities, social commitments and household chores. We can often be so busy that life seems to pass us by. We may fail to see when someone we care about needs our attention, or notice a glorious day or even acknowledge that we may not be living our lives to the fullest.



More people are feeling this way, which is why the practice of mindfulness is becoming increasingly popular. It is a way of pulling us back to the present and living in the moment. Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, Professor of Medicine Emeritus and creator of the Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, defines it as "paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally – as if your life depended on it.”

Though it has its roots in Buddhist meditation, a secular practice of mindfulness has recently entered the mainstream, in part through the work of Dr. Kabat-Zinn and his Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, which he introduced in 1979. Since that time, thousands of studies have documented the physical and mental health benefits of mindfulness in general – and MBSR in particular – inspiring countless programs to adapt the model for schools, prisons, hospitals, veteran centres, and beyond.

Five steps to mindfulness

There are many ways to become more mindful and care about your life moment by moment. Five tips are:

1. **Take five minutes each day to stop “doing” and experience “being.”** Take a bath, quietly drink some tea, listen to music, meditate or pray. Try mindfulness meditation: sit in a comfortable chair. Empty your mind and focus on your breathing – the “in” breath, then the “out” breath. If your mind begins to wander, refocus on your breathing.

2. **Practice gratitude.** Think about things for which you are grateful. This brings your mind to the present moment and the things that are important in your life. Many people find it helpful to keep a gratitude journal in which they write down a certain number of things they are thankful for every day.

3. **Have compassion.** When we are feeling stressed and overwhelmed it is easy to think we are the only ones struggling. Having compassion for others makes it easier to think about the positive aspects of our lives.

4. **Accept yourself and others.** Stop striving for perfection and berating yourself because you are not perfect. Negative self-judgment damages your self-esteem and how you interact with others. It will also prevent you from taking action to improve your life.

5. **Do not take life's challenges too personally.** When we are confronted with a job loss, the end of a relationship or any difficult situation, we tend to blame ourselves and get stuck in "if only" thinking. This can send us into a state of inaction and depression. Instead, bring things into the present moment by acknowledging your feelings and asking what you are going to do, right now, to move forward.

If you fill every moment of your life with doing things – working, talking, playing on the computer, running errands – you may never give yourself a chance to simply *be*. Simply sitting and smelling the coffee isn't just pleasant, it is important for our happiness and mental health.

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