

How Mindfulness Can Help You Navigate the Coronavirus



Awareness vs Autopilot

Especially during times of crisis, it's easy to feel distracted and frazzled, zooming through life on autopilot and falling into habitual patterns of coping or dealing with stress.

One of the greatest benefits of mindfulness is that it helps us **step out of autopilot** and become more aware and tuned into our experiences. From this place of awareness, we have much more agency to make choices that will support our own wellbeing, and the wellbeing of those around us.



News Consumption

Bringing awareness to when, where, and how often we consume media that activates tension is an important step in protecting our health. It's important to stay informed AND there's a balance to be found. Too much news can easily fuel anxiety, tax your system, and create feelings of overwhelm. Instead of automatically clicking news notifications or turning on the TV, mindfulness helps us pause and check in: *"Is this necessary right now?" "Will this be useful or detrimental?" "Is there a more nourishing way to spend this time?"*



Fear and Anxiety

If we're not mindful of our fear and anxious thoughts, they can quickly overwhelm us. Mindfulness helps us bring awareness to our emotions so that we can work with them consciously, instead of allowing them to churn beneath the surface. In this way, we create more mental flexibility to recognize and acknowledge our fears and anxious thoughts, but not run away with them. Each time we practice acknowledging and coming back to what's present - here and now - we can settle our nerves and operate from a much more grounded place.



Muscle Tension

Any time we feel challenged or threatened, our body tenses up as part of our automatic defense mechanism. Especially during times of high stress, anxious thoughts or underlying fears cause a steady drip of tension to build up in our bodies (i.e. clenching our jaw, fists, or abdominal muscles). Meditation and mindfulness practices help strengthen our mind-body connection so we can notice when we're holding tension and soften our muscles throughout the day. Each time we relax our muscles, we're sending a signal to our nervous system that it's okay to settle a bit. This, in turn, helps settle and calm our anxious mind.



Relationships

When we're under stress, our fuse gets shorter. If you've been feeling more irritable or reactive lately, you're not alone. Our routines are thrown off, we're suddenly sprung into quarantine alone or with our loved ones, AND we're faced with deep fear and uncertainty – the perfect recipe to lose our cool. Mindfulness strengthens our ability to take a *pause and respond intentionally instead of react automatically* in challenging moments. When we are tending to our own emotions, creating space to slow down and breathe, and remembering to be kind to ourselves, we'll discover more balance and patience, even amidst the waves.



Uncertainty

Most of life is wildly uncertain, and yet we do our best as humans to maintain a sense of control and predictability in our daily experience. When we come face-to-face with uncertainty (like we are right now) we can no longer rely on our external circumstances for a sense of stability. Mindfulness helps us be with the uncomfortable feelings of uncertainty, while accessing our inner resources to find a sense of steadiness and okay-ness from within. We're not getting rid of the uncertainty, but rather learning to work with it skillfully. As Jon-Kabat Zinn says, "*You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf.*"



Kindness

Being human is far from easy, even when things are going "well". In times of turbulence, one of the greatest strengths we can offer ourselves and our loved ones is a baseline of kindness. We can recognize that we are all very likely struggling and on edge as we navigate our own suffering. Mindfulness reminds us that it's always possible to take some deep breaths and let kindness rise to the surface.

You can't stop the waves,
but you can learn to surf.

Jon Kabat-Zinn

