



MINDFULNESS IN A MANIC WORLD

Can you really airlift your brain out of the relentless digital onslaught? Yep. In seconds.

By Ashley Mateo

MINDFULNESS IS SUCH A LOFTY, NEW AGEY TERM.

But, really, it's just a down-to-earth tool for managing anxiety. "Mindfulness keeps you present," explains Larry D. Rosen, PhD, coauthor of *The Distracted Mind: Ancient Brains in a High-Tech World*. "When you're anxious, you're not in the moment—you're in the future." People have never been more future-focused (and anxious) than now, thanks to 24/7 connectivity and the pressures of social media. Instead of being in the moment, they're thinking about how these moments could play out online. In fact, more than 60 percent of women between the ages of 18 and 24 admitted to feeling "overwhelmed by social media," according to a 2018 Bumble survey. "The social pressure to be on your phone on a regular basis is huge," says sociologist Amy Shields Dobson, PhD, author of *Postfeminist Digital Cultures: Femininity, Social Media, and Self-Representation*. "These days, feminism means being empowered—which means constantly putting yourself out there on social media. That quantification of self, the seeking of outside approval in a very public way, can set up powerful habits." Habits like consistently posting and interacting across at least six different social-media sites (the average number millennials are active on, says Rosen—and that's not including texting and e-mailing). The pressure isn't just internal though. "Whether it's our pace of life, the overstimulating number of inputs our brains process every day, the exploding in-box, or geopolitical issues, research shows that stress is on the rise," says Megan Jones Bell, PsyD, the chief science officer at Headspace, an app that teaches mindfulness and meditation. ⇒⇒

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OUR PHONES have become a conduit for all that stress, says Rosen, and the minute you log off, that anxiety that you're missing something kicks in, and cortisol, the stress hormone, starts to build up. The more you check in, the more primed your body becomes to that anxiety response. Relationships suffer too: Just having your phone within sight can stifle closeness, trust, and empathy, a study in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* found. Practicing mindfulness, then, is a way to regain a healthy sense of control, not to mention breathing space. Doing it for 20 minutes per day can help decrease overall cortisol levels by more than 50 percent, according to research published in the journal *Psychoneuroendocrinology* (say that five times fast). The more you practice, the easier it becomes—and the better you'll feel. "There's been more and more acknowledgment that this 24/7 connectivity is problematic for some of us," says Dobson. "But we don't have to be victims of technology."

HOW TO PRACTICE MINDFULNESS LITERALLY ANYWHERE

All "being mindful" really means is bringing your attention to the present with zero judgment of what's going on in that moment. Translation: "It probably takes a minimum of a second to practice," says Ellie Burrows Gluck, the cofounder and CEO of MNDFL, a meditation company in New York City.

- 1 GET COMFORTABLE**
Sit tall, letting your hands rest a few inches from your knees. "Tuck your chin slightly and relax the muscles in your face, allowing your jaw to hang open slightly," says Gluck. You can keep your eyes open, gazing three to four feet in front of you, or closed.
- 2 FOCUS ON YOUR BREATH**
"Don't change it, just bring your attention to where you feel it most naturally," she says. Think: the rise and fall of your chest or the air passing in and out of your nostrils. Following that cycle from inhale to exhale—including the space in between—disrupts intrusive thoughts.
- 3 LET YOUR THOUGHTS FLOW**
Mindfulness isn't about turning off thoughts but rather being aware of them and how they affect you. "When you notice your mind wandering—and it will—just gently remind yourself to come back to the breath," says Gluck.

HOW ARE MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION DIFFERENT?

Meditation is used as an umbrella term to describe techniques and practices that involve contemplation and visualization. *Mindfulness* is just one type of meditation, says Gluck.



TURN YOUR SMARTPHONE INTO A DUMBPHONE

All technology companies want is to keep your eyeballs on the screen. But you can use tech to help you manage tech, says Bell.

MONITOR YOUR SCREEN TIME

Both Apple and Android allow you to track your "digital wellness" (i.e., how often you use your phone). Go under "Settings" to see which apps are your biggest time sucks, and add time limits—like 30 minutes per day for social media—to keep yourself in check.

DECLUTTER YOUR HOME SCREEN

Put your social media apps in a folder, then embed that folder within another folder. Now, instead of mindlessly checking in, you'll have to work for it each time. P.S. The only app on your home screen should be one for—wait for it—mindfulness.

MAKE YOURSELF ACCOUNTABLE

Announcing something makes you more likely to follow through, so tell friends and family you're cutting down on screen time. Better yet, let your app do it for you: Bumble's "Snooze" feature sets statuses like "I'm on a digital detox" for as long as you like.

APPS THAT HELP



HEADSPACE
Cue up a two-minute meditation or an SOS session when you're freaking out. (Free trial; \$12.99/month)



10% HAPPIER
Get a crash course in mindfulness with daily videos and guided meditations. (\$9.99/month)



HAPPY NOT PERFECT
Try the Daily Refresh, a seven-step routine, to start your day off right. (\$11.99/month)



CALM
With 100+ mindfulness exercises from 3 to 25 minutes, there's always time for a breather. (Free trial; \$12.99/month)