

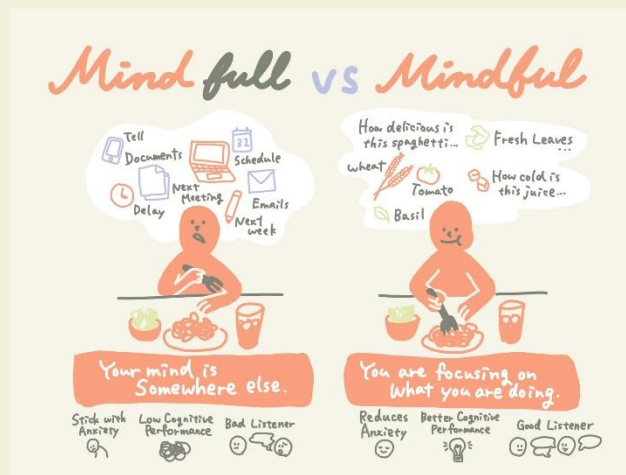
WEEK 4: GRATITUDE AND MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is the act of paying attention to your present moment experience with an attitude of compassionate curiosity. It can be integrated into every aspect of our lives, offering numerous benefits such as stress reduction, improved emotional clarity, heightened self-awareness, faster recovery from negative experiences, better regulation of thoughts and emotions, and enhanced overall mental and physical health for individuals. Moreover, practicing mindfulness may result in increased happiness, a more positive mood, greater life satisfaction, reduced materialism, decreased likelihood of burnout, better sleep, reduced fatigue, and the development of patience, humility, and wisdom, while also diminishing rumination. Furthermore, group benefits include enhanced prosocial behaviors, strengthened relationships, potential improvements in employee effectiveness, and the possibility of increased job satisfaction.

1. Enjoy a distraction-free meal.

With your next meal, try single-tasking and just eating, with no screens or distractions.

Try engaging all your senses into the eating experience. Notice the different aromas and colors on your plate before eating and slow down and enjoy the different flavors with each bite.



Multitasking and eating are a recipe for not being able to listen deeply to our body's needs and wants. Have you ever had the experience of going to the movies with a bucket full of popcorn, and before you know it, it's all gone, and you don't really remember eating it?

When we are distracted, it becomes harder to listen to our body's signals about food and other needs. Research has shown that eating more mindfully can lead to greater psychological wellbeing, increased pleasure when eating, and body satisfaction.

Interested in learning more about eating mindfully or how to honor your body's needs through eating intuitively?

- Check out our [4-Week Mindfulness Workshops!](#)
- Check out our [4-Week Intuitive Eating Workshops!](#)

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2. Find your calm.

Explore activities that will help you return to and maintain a relaxed state when you become too tense. The goal is not to master every activity you explore, but to find at least one or two that can support you in various circumstances.

| Some options for finding your calm: | |
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| Belly breathing | One of the simplest and most effective ways to calm the nervous system and lower our stress. After just a few minutes of practice, belly breathing helps to slow the heart rate, lower blood pressure, and decrease muscle tension. Learn more and follow a 2-minute guided belly breathing exercise . |
| Body scanning | A very useful and effective meditation that involves paying attention to parts of the body and bodily sensations in a gradual sequence from feet to head. Try a 3-minute guided body scan . |
| A gentle yoga practice | This can be a great way to center yourself in your present moment of movement and physically release tension that builds up on your body. This can be done any time of day, but here is one bedtime yoga practice to check out. |
| A mindful walk through nature | When was the last time you went on a walk without listening to music or a podcast, and had no destination in mind? Hear the sounds around you. Smell the fresh air. Maintain awareness of the movement and muscles in your body. What else do you notice? Check out these links for tips to walk more mindfully: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mindful Walking• 7 ways to appreciate the natural world |
| Meditative play or cook | Draw, paint, play music, sing or engage in some other creative activity that brings you joyously into your present moment experience. Some people also find their calm in the mindful repetitions of cutting vegetables for a new or favorite meal. |
| Soothing sounds | Listen to calming music (instrumental or classical). |
| Aromatherapy | Aromatherapy entails inhaling essential oils or applying them (diluted) through methods like massage or in a bath. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• NOTE: While there are still mixed results (due to variations in research context, methods, sample sizes, and an overall lack of conclusive evidence regarding its effectiveness), many studies show potential benefits of aromatherapy and many individuals report enjoying the aroma of their favorite scents. |
| REMINDER: This list isn't exhaustive; there are numerous options to explore for finding calm and reducing stress. Enjoy discovering what piques your curiosity. | |

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3. Reflect on your week and write down 3 things you are grateful for.

Select a specific day each week to designate as your gratitude day, dedicating time to reflect on and appreciate the things you are thankful for. Noting gratitude trains the mind to focus on positives, counteracting the tendency to dwell on negatives. Experts suggest noting what is positive or writing down 2 or 3 things we are grateful for, increases happiness and reduces stress. This simple practice takes very little time and can be done through various methods, such as writing in a notebook, on your phone, or even noted mentally. Whether it's acknowledging significant achievements or everyday joys, practicing gratitude contributes to a positive mindset.

Advanced tip: Consider making it a daily practice at a consistent time. Some prefer mornings, incorporating it with breakfast, showering, or brushing teeth to start the day positively, while others find it beneficial before bedtime for reflection. The chosen time doesn't matter; consistency in your routine is what matters most.

Additional Resources:

- [Grateful Hawks: Gratitude Resource Guide](#)
- [Ways to become more grateful](#)
- [40 simple ways to practice gratitude](#)

4. Do a relaxation exercise before bed.

Engaging in activities that calm your body and mind helps prepare you for restful sleep. Doing a calming activity about 30-60 minutes before bedtime can help reduce the length of time it takes to fall asleep. Finding activities you find restful can also help during the day when you have transition times or rough moments. Taking a few minutes to do a restful activity can reset your mind to face the rest of your day more calmly.

Some relaxation exercises to try:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have a cup of tea (decaf or herbal)• Read poetry• Review positive affirmations• Read just for enjoyment• Journal• Take a warm bath or shower• Smooth on lotion• Listen to calming music | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do some gentle stretching or yoga movement• Use a foam roller, tennis or other small ball to roll out tight muscles• Meditate or pray• Eat a light or small snack (one that includes whole grains, lean protein, nuts/seeds or dairy may increase serotonin release in the brain, aiding in calming effects) |
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For additional support, download a sleep or meditation app or podcast and listen to it or use the app at least once.

- [UI Refresh Sleep program](#)
- [Dharma Seed](#) has hundreds of talks on meditation, all for free.
- Kristin Neff's free [self-compassion meditations](#)
- **Apps:** Calm, Headspace, Mindfulness Daily (free)

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5. Practice putting your phone down in social settings.

This week, make an effort to prioritize social connections and minimize phone usage in the presence of others. Going phone-free, even briefly each day, yields significant benefits such as increased attention, improved cognition, reduced aches and pains, better posture, enhanced social life, and potential boosts in happiness. Despite many peoples tendency to avoid interactions with strangers, research shows that even small social exchanges, like chatting with a barista or the person next to you on the bus, can positively impact mood and foster a sense of belonging. Even just making eye contact with strangers has been shown to enhance a sense of inclusion. Smartphone use can hinder these interactions, but putting it away removes barriers and signals openness to connecting with others. While the mood enhancement from conversing with strangers may appear temporary, well-being research indicates that a joyful life consists of a frequent occurrence of positive events, where even small positive connections can have a meaningful impact.

Tips for connection:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Embrace a subtle smile, head nod, or wave• Introduce yourself and ask someone to introduce themselves• Try telling a joke• Offer an act of kindness (i.e., give up your seat, hold a door open, etc.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Invite someone to share what is on their mind• Mention something you might have in common• Give a friendly compliment• Ask for help, or offer your assistance |
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End of Week Reflection:

Don't forget to submit a reflection at the end of the week on the **Week 4 Reflection Discussion Post** on ICON!

Reflecting helps us develop our skills and review their effectiveness, rather than just carry-on doing things as we have always done them. It is about questioning, in a positive way, what we do and why we do it and then deciding whether there is a better, or more efficient, way of doing it in the future.