

## Mindfulness – An Introduction with Demonstrations

### ***What is mindfulness?***

When we hear the word “mindfulness”—“mind” and “full” or “fullness”—it sounds like our mind is full of something.

Ordinarily, what are our minds full of? Thoughts. Our thoughts go so fast, jumping from one thing to the next. Our mind is so busy with all kinds of thoughts—remembering, learning, planning, analyzing, worrying, wondering, hoping, feeling emotions, and so forth.

Mindfulness means giving our hard-working mind a little break, to calm it down.

We can’t just make our mind less full, or empty, to relax—our thoughts won’t go away just because we want them to.

So, we fill it instead with something much more relaxing—more relaxing and refreshing than a movie or videogame. We go to a quiet place and fill our mind with whatever is coming in from our senses—our senses of sound, touch, smell, and taste.

To be mindful, it’s easiest not to use our sense of vision, because our eyes take in so much information, making our minds very busy, full of thoughts.

So, closing our eyes, we notice whatever we hear and whatever we feel from our body’s sense of touch, and maybe also what we smell or taste—in each moment, one after another, one moment at a time. We can call it mindfulness or moment-by-moment awareness.

Moment-by-moment awareness is a bit like a time-lapse photo, noticing one moment, then the next moment, then the next moment, and so on, except we use senses other than vision.



It’s as if we ask ourselves, “What do you hear or feel now? And now? And now?” over and over.

Like a scientist, we just observe—we don't judge, analyze or think about what we're hearing, feeling, smelling or tasting. We just keep noticing whatever comes in through our senses—so many things we don't usually notice—each moment, one after another.

### ***Mindfulness While Sitting***

Let's try it: Sit very still and close your eyes.

Right here, right now, what do you hear, what do you feel?

Maybe you hear the ticking of a clock, the hum of a fan, the sound of traffic, or birds chirping.

Maybe you feel the pressure of the chair, cushion or floor under you; you feel your shirt against your shoulders and back; the warmth of your fingers against each other, you feel your eyelids on your eyes, your tongue against your teeth, your lips touching each other, the pressure and warmth of whatever your arms and hands are resting on.

Notice anything else that you hear or feel.

### ***Mindfulness of Breathing***

Now let's direct our awareness to our breathing. Just breathe naturally.

Notice when you're breathing in. And then notice when you're breathing out.

Notice your abdomen moving naturally as you breathe. Relax your belly completely—let it stick out. You can place your hand on your belly to feel it moving. Feel it move out as you breathe in, and feel it move back in when you breathe out.

Feel your chest expand as your lungs fill with air. Feel your chest relax as the air flows out.

Next, notice how the air feels in the nose as you breathe in, and how it feels in the nose when breathing out.

Maybe you feel the air is cooler as you breathe in, and warmer as you breathe out.

As you breathe naturally, try to notice the moment when you are finished breathing in, just before you breathe out. And notice the moment when you are finished breathing out, just before you start breathing in.

Next, notice the feeling at the tip of your nose as you breathe in and out.

And now, notice the feeling deep in your nose as you breathe in and out.

### ***Mindfulness While Eating***

Let's try mindful eating: Hold a grape, berry or small chunk of fruit on your palm.

Close your eyes. Notice how that fruit feels in your palm—its weight, coolness, smoothness.

Next, hold the fruit in your fingers, notice how it feels against your fingers—its firmness or softness, coolness, smoothness.

Next, very, very slowly bring your hand with the fruit toward your lips. Notice the feeling of your fingers grasping, your arm moving, elbow bending, moment by moment.

Can you smell the fruit as it comes close to your face?

Notice how the fruit feels when it touches your lips, and hold it against your lips for a moment.

Next, slowly push the fruit into your mouth and hold it there for a moment without biting.

Feel the fruit against your tongue, teeth, roof of your mouth. Is it cool, smooth, soft, or firm?

Next, slowly bite the fruit. Notice exactly all the sensations of taste and feel and sound as the you chew it—the juiciness, sweetness; the feeling of your tongue, teeth, and roof of your mouth against the fruit.

***Demonstration With Dried Beans:***

(On a table or the floor, place an illustration of a person's head in profile, and next to it, a pile each of lima beans, red beans, spotted and/or pinto beans, and black beans)

Let's make a picture, an artistic representation, of what our mind looks like typically in our daily life, and what it looks like when we are mindful.

We'll use these dried beans to represent different types of thoughts on this drawing of a person's head.

Let's imagine that these big lima beans are our strong, unpleasant emotions, or "big feelings," like anger, hatred, jealousy, revenge, fear, and worry. These strong emotions take up a lot of space in our mind, because we tend to think a lot about things that upset us. So, we sprinkle some lima beans on the picture to represent our strong emotional thoughts.

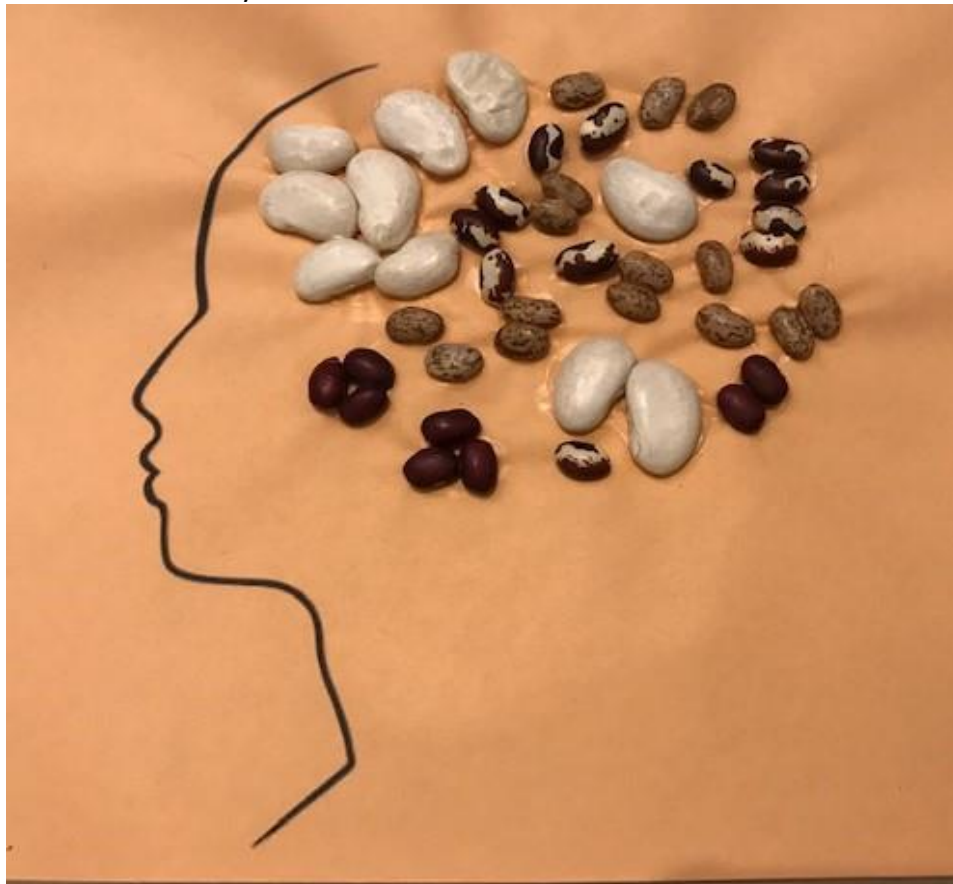
Let's imagine that these red beans represent our happy, excited feelings, for example the joy we feel when we're going somewhere special with a friend, going to a party, looking forward to our favorite activity, winning a sports competition, or receiving a wonderful gift. Sometimes we have happy thoughts, so we sprinkle some red beans on the picture.

Let's imagine that these spotted beans and pinto beans represent ordinary thoughts of the future, such as what we have to do tomorrow, our plans and expectations, and thoughts of the past, like what we did yesterday, and what we learned earlier.

We have many thoughts of the past and future, so we sprinkle many pinto beans on the picture.

So now we see many different types of thoughts filling our mind, represented on this picture.

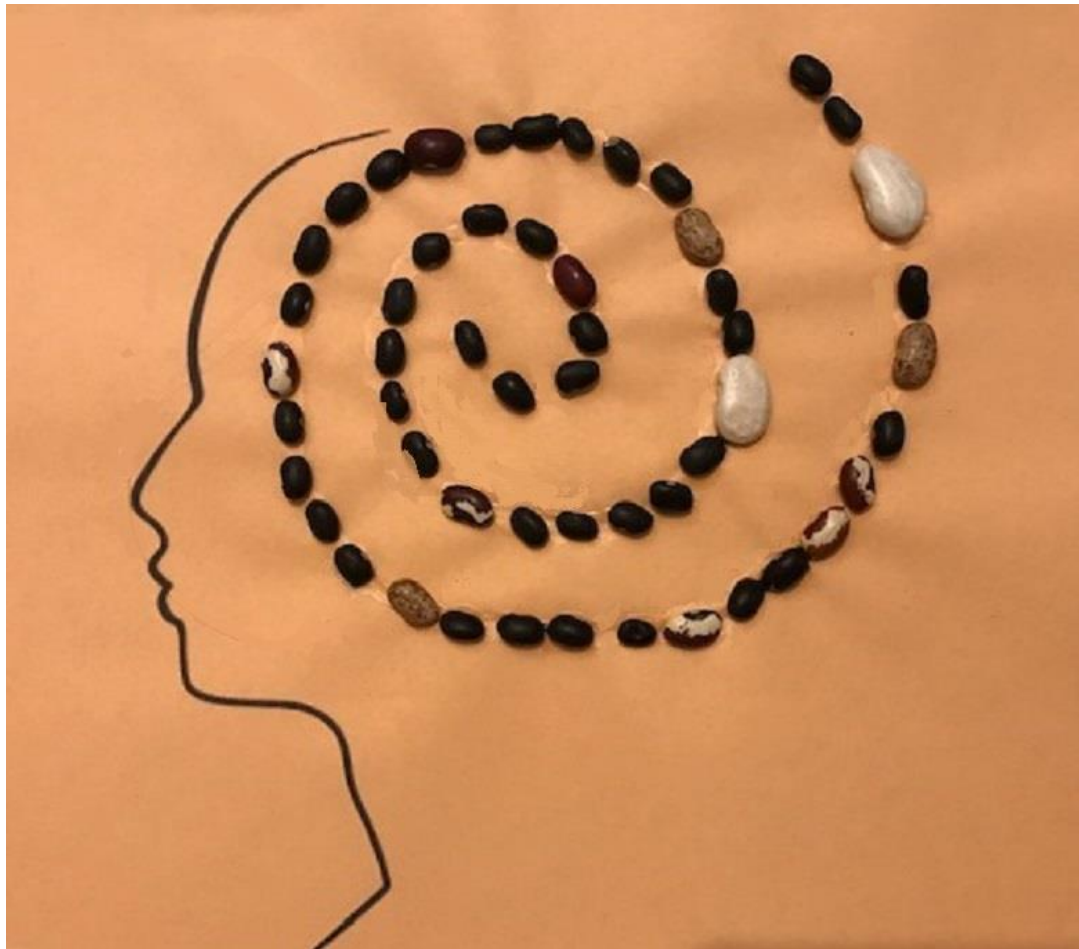
This is our ordinary mind.



Next, let's make a picture representing what a mind looks like when we practice mindfulness. Let's imagine that each black bean is one moment of the mind hearing, feeling, smelling or tasting something, noticing, one after another. So, we make a continuous line of black beans, one next to another.

But sometimes we get distracted by a thought—a happy thought, a thought of the past or future, or maybe a strong emotion. So we put a few of those other beans in our line of black beans, like interruptions in our line of mindfulness.

This is a representation of our mind when we are practicing mindfulness.



What do you think of those two pictures we made?

Our ordinary mind looks chaotic, crowded, a jumble of all types of beans.

Our mindful mind looks organized and neat—a peaceful mind.

### ***Benefits of Mindfulness***

Why should we practice mindfulness? How is mindfulness useful to us?

Mindfulness is like a walk in nature—it helps us to calm down and feel more positive, confident, and able to focus.

It can change our busy, agitated, overstimulated or tired mind to a relaxed but fully alert, clear and refreshed mind.

If we make that change to our mind—if we practice mindfulness—before we start doing something important, then we can do our best.

What are some important activities you do that would be easier when your mind is calm and clear, refreshed and alert? Studying, taking a test, playing a sport, performing music or dance, making a presentation, learning how to do something, making a speech.

Just before we do any of those activities, or any other important activity, we can practice mindfulness wherever we are, closing or half closing our eyes for a few seconds while we are standing or sitting. Then we feel more calm, focused and confident.

Mindfulness also can help us when we're stressed or upset.

It reduces anxiety because it takes our mind away from unpleasant thoughts.

And it calms our body—it helps slow our breathing and heart rate, reduces tension in our muscles, and relaxes an overstimulated brain and nerves.

When we practice mindfulness often, we are more aware of the changes in our body when it's stressed and when it's relaxed, so then we're more aware of when stress begins or when our unpleasant emotions (such as anger, hatred, and jealousy) start to arise. And that gives us a chance to choose our reactions and responses before we react impulsively, before we say or do something we may regret.

In addition, when we're mindful, we're more aware, so we're more aware of any danger around us, and more aware of what we're doing so we don't forget where we put things.

We can practice a "moment of mindfulness" for just a few seconds anywhere we are.

We can practice mindfulness just before we go to bed so we can relax and sleep better.

The more we practice, the more it becomes a good habit, and the more benefits we feel, just like practicing a sport improves our performance, and exercising makes us stronger.

Eventually, our mindfulness will enable us to meditate very deeply, which will give us great happiness and wisdom.

### ***Mindful walking:***

Start by mindful standing: close your eyes, and notice the feeling of your feet on the ground, and the position of your arms and hands. Take a long breath in and out, noticing the movement of the belly and chest as you breathe, and the feeling of air going in and out of the nose.

Next, open your eyes and carefully notice as you take a step: slowly lifting one foot, extending it forward, then placing it on the ground. Then do the same with the other foot.

Walk as slowly as possible, looking at the ground directly in front of you.

You can think: "lifting, placing,...lifting, placing" over and over as you pay attention to each step.

Or you can think, "lifting, extending, placing,...lifting, extending, placing" with each step.

Remember to go as slow as you can without losing your balance.

Or you can pay close attention to all the sensations, what you feel, in your legs and feet—the heel, ball of foot, and toes—as you take each step. And, if you're outside, you can be aware of all the sounds you hear, and the feeling of wind and sun on your body.

Maybe you can have a "zombie race," competing to see who can mindfully walk the slowest!