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## The Skinny on Mindfulness & Meditation

### Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the awareness that arises when we pay attention to the present moment without judgment. Our minds are constantly flooded with thoughts typically rehashing the past or rehearsing for the future. When our thoughts dwell in the past, we tend to get depressed. When our minds are contemplating about the future, we tend to be anxious. When we practice mindfulness, we can respond to what is actually happening in the moment, instead of reacting to whatever is going on in our anxious, frustrated, regretful, overactive brains. We can look at reality without the judgment and fearful stories we tell ourselves. As humans, we are constantly judging situations, others and ourselves. We tend to resist what is happening and want to control it. There is traffic. She's so picky. I'm so fat. When we can allow for our thoughts and feelings just as they are, without resistance, we embrace life and live peacefully and authentically.

### Meditation

Meditation is the exercise we do to train our brains to be mindful. It is not religious or "new age woo-woo". Just like we work out our bodies, this is a workout for our brain. It trains us to be focused, clear and present. In mindfulness meditation we use our breath as the object and follow it with our attention. This helps calm the mind and increases our ability to focus. When the mind is clear, we can listen to our inner voice when the noise quiets down. We practice interrupting our thoughts before we get lost in the story. This will make us more aware in life when we are stressing ourselves out. We can recognize the nature and quality of our thoughts and choose not to be ruled by them. The muscle of mindfulness is built by your attention wandering and then bringing it back to the breath gently without judgment. Many of us don't think we can meditate, or give up easily, because we can't turn off our brain and think of nothing. And the truth is... No one can! It is not thinking of nothing, but rather focusing our attention. It is a simple instruction, but not easy to do. However, in a short time you will reduce stress and anxiety, boost energy, and increase clarity and joy!



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***Want to start to meditate but don't know how? Here are a few simple instructions that will get you started.***

**1. Location Location Location:** Pick a quiet spot in your house, which will be your meditation area. You can have a cushion, or it can be a couch or chair. You can place some candles there, or things you enjoy making it special.

**2. Timing is everything :** Pick a time that will work for you. Deepak Chopra suggests RPM, "rise, pee and meditate". Maybe after kids leave for school. Whatever is convenient for your specific lifestyle and schedule. Same time every day is ideal, but consistency is key, so be flexible with yourself. Just do it!

**3. Sit upright but not uptight:** Taking your seat comfortably is key. You may sit on a meditation cushion or pillow, cross-legged, with your knees resting slightly below your hips. A chair or couch is fine too, but you want to sit at attention, not too stiff. You may lie down if this is more comfortable, but it may be difficult not to fall asleep. Eyes can be open or closed and body relaxed.

**4. "I don't have any time":** If you have time to surf Facebook and social media, you have 5-10 minutes to meditate daily. Start small and slowly increase. 20 minutes a day is ideal.

**5. Just breathe:** Mindfulness meditation is focusing on your breath as the object of meditation. Follow your breath with your attention, when your mind wanders (which it will, come back to your breath).

**6. Don't just do something, sit there! :** This is not a natural state for our brains, so be patient and do not judge how well you are doing this. Just taking time out to just sit in the beginning is a major feat. With time your mind will settle, do not give up!

**7. Guidance is key In the beginning:** I recommend guided meditations, like the ones in this resource center. The first meditation is a general one you can use over and over. Then you can try it with just a timer on your own.