

The Power Of Mindfulness

Your Free Mindfulness Report

Despite appearances, most of us are not truly in control of our own minds. We think we are because we basically have the ability to decide what we want to think about and how we want to act, but this only happens when we consciously make the decision to do that. It only happens when we're *mindful* of our thoughts and of our emotions.

The rest of the time however, we are simply free-wheeling and reacting. We don't give much thought to how we're thinking or what we're focussed on and as such, our minds have a way of running away with us. For instance, you might be walking through a beautiful, scenic location with friends and really you should be in a very happy mood and enjoying yourself.

But instead, you're actually just stressed and angry because you can't stop thinking about work. As a result, you don't enjoy your experience and actually it's pretty bad for your health. But you don't think about the role your own mind has in this – instead you blame your job. You act like a passive victim with no ability to decide what they will focus on.

Likewise, we will sometimes come home and feel tired and completely devoid of motivation when really we should be focussed and engaged – so we can work out, work on side projects, tidy our homes or do any of the other things that we're constantly telling ourselves (and other people!) that we're going to do.

Sometimes we will have difficulty getting to sleep because we can't stop thinking about the tasks that lie ahead.

We don't approach people in bars or we fail exams because we lack confidence and feel nervous.

So the question in all these scenarios becomes: how do you go about getting back in charge of your thoughts? How can you decide to stop letting emotions run away with you?

The Power of Controlling Your Thoughts and Emotions

The first step to gaining control of your emotions then is to use mindfulness – to simply be more aware of your thoughts at any given time.

When you're wondering through that beautiful scenery, you need to be able to open your eyes and make the conscious decision that you're going to forget work and instead look at the flowers and the plants, that you're going to laugh with your friends and that you're going to be mindful of the feeling of the sun on your face and just how lucky you are to be alive on such a glorious day.

This alone is enough to completely transform your experience of being there. You'll have more fun, you'll be more refreshed and the people you are with are going to have a better time being with you. They're going to want to be with you more often!

Now imagine if you could decide to engage full motivation whenever you wanted to.

Take a look at the most successful people in the world and you will find that they all have one thing in common: drive and determination. Will Smith says the secret to success is simply being willing to run longer than anyone else on the treadmill of life. Dwayne 'the Rock' Johnson regularly updates his Instagram followers with photos of his phone alarm going off at 4am in the morning, ready for a workout. And Arnold Schwarzenegger said he *always* kept in mind his goal of being a successful bodybuilder.

These people never have a day where they get out of bed and they can't be bothered. You can practically *feel* the motivation and the energy coming off of them and in fact it's even magnetic.

Imagine what you could tap in if you were like that. You could be you but in better shape, with more money and with more exciting life experiences...

We can do that with mindfulness but first let's look at how the brain actually works to regulate our emotions and thoughts in this way...

A Quick Guide to Basic Neuroscience

When you feel too tired to work, what's happening?

When you feel filled with energy and enthusiasm, why is that?

And why are you sometimes stressed and alert and transfixed on what's happening?

It all comes down to one simple thing: chemistry. More specifically, it comes down to neurochemistry and the fact that your brain releases different chemicals at different times.

Your brain is made up of billions of neurons. These are brain cells, which look very much like other cells in the body save for their large tendrils which allow them to connect to one another. Each of these cells encodes a memory or an experience. If you were to trigger one of those cells with an electrode (which some psychologists actually do in studies) then you might see a 'pixel' light up in your vision or you might start reliving a certain memory.

When one neuron fires, it releases energy down its tendrils and this then jumps across to other neurons. It's very rare for any brain cell to fire on its own without it causing others around it to fire as well. This is called an 'action potential' and more specifically, this involves a small current running down the 'axon' (tail) and then reaching the end where it will split off into little roots (called terminals). Reaching out to those terminals are the dendrites of other neurons but they don't quite touch; there's a small gap called the 'synaptic terminal' across which the current has to jump in order for the other neuron to be stimulated. With enough stimulation, that other neuron will also fire.

But at the ends of the synapses are 'neuro vessicles' which are tiny sacs containing neurotransmitters. And when those neurotransmitters get released, they connect to the surrounding neurons via 'receptors' and color our experience. Neurotransmitters can make neurons more likely to fire (these are known as 'excitatory neurotransmitters'), they can make new connections more likely to form (creating new memories) or they can make us feel happier or sadder (affecting how we feel the next time those neurons fire too).

Neurotransmitters can also enter the brain in other ways. For example, our diet can affect our neurotransmitters: eating sugar for instance increases the amount of tryptophan that gets to the brain and our brain uses this tryptophan in order to create serotonin – the feel good hormone! That's why we're in such a good mood after we've eaten. Serotonin eventually converts to melatonin though – the sleep hormone – and this makes us ready for bed (hence why everyone falls asleep after Christmas dinner). When serotonin gets low, this causes the release of more cortisol in our brains – the 'stress' hormone. That makes us anxious and jittery. It also increases ghrelin, which makes us hungry!

Other things have a range of other effects. First thing in the morning for instance, we produce more cortisol. And as we get tireder throughout the day, our brain builds up with adenosine (a by-product of synaptic transmissions) making us groggy.

Hormones can also affect the neurons just like neurotransmitters in many instances. For instance, testosterone makes us more likely to be aggressive, while oestrogen can make us more likely to be emotional.

Why You Need Mindfulness

So why am I telling you all this?

Simply, I am underlying just how complex your emotions are and how tied to your biology they are. If you don't learn to understand your own mind, then you will be forever at the mercy of these chemicals.

This is why we sometimes fly off the handle and shout at people when we're hungry, when we're tired or if we're hormonal. It's why we can fall asleep and feel tired when we really want to be productive.

But once we start to understand this, then we can start to wrestle back control. For example, simply recognizing that you're angry because you're tired or hungry can allow you to step back. You'll find your brain thinking mean things about people but if you have more self-awareness, then you can step back and say 'I'm just tired/hungry/upset, I don't mean those things and it will pass'. Once you can do that, you can be much happier.

Likewise, it's useful to understand how the connections in our brain work. If two neurons fire at the same time, it strengthens their connection and this makes them more likely to fire at the same time in future. This is how bad habits form and it's also why we can form bad habits regarding the way we think. It's why you can be in a beautiful park but really only thinking about work. We can only really attend to one thing at once, which means we're either engaged with the world around us or we're not.

This is why we're more prone to making mistakes when we're upset – we're too distracted and we're unable to make the decision to focus on what we're doing and on what really *needs* our full attention at any given moment.

And these connections in the brain are also where things like phobias come from, or fears that we don't really need.

When you use mindfulness, what you are doing is saying 'no, I don't want to think that – I want to think this'. You actively choose which parts of the brain you're going to pay attention to and how you're going to feel and behave as a result.

So instead of thinking about work, you can choose to instead look at the world around you. And when this happens, you'll release different neurotransmitters, creating a much more positive experience.

Likewise, when you find yourself getting distracted at work, you can decide you want to focus back on work. Now you'll be focussing on neurons that release focus hormones. You'll increase your dopamine and your norepinephrine and your productivity will improve.

This way, you can choose to be happier, to be more productive, or to be more restful. Ideally, you'll be all those things at once!

Why Your Attention is What Really Matters

Because here's the thing: it's your attention, your awareness and your interpretation of events that really matters.

You can be happy in the worst conditions. You can be productive in the worst conditions. Or you can be in paradise and be nothing but stressed.

Imagine for a moment that you're in a bus that has come off the road. It tipped over and slid on its side to the edge of a cliff, where it is now hanging half over. You know that if you move, you could upset the balance and send the whole thing plummeting into the ravine below.

So what happens to you? Well, you become very still obviously! But at the same time, your body also starts to produce a number of hormones and neurotransmitters associated with stress. These include dopamine, norepinephrine, adrenaline and even serotonin. Your heart rate increases, your muscles contract...

But what you *don't* know is that the bus is actually safely chained to the ground because the emergency services have been working on it. So it's not your situation that dictated the response – it's your belief!

And just look at what a difference it can make to your mood if you decide to purposefully think about the saddest moments from your life. Most of us would not even be willing to try that as an experiment...

The same goes for what you choose to focus on and what you choose to believe.

So by reprogramming that, you can become happier and more content. And what you'll often find out when you do this, is that you already have all the things you need to be happier. But you're so busy working hard and trying to get more that you don't stop to appreciate them.

Some Powerful Mindfulness Practices You Can Try Right Now

So let's start with one form of mindfulness right away, that being 'gratitude'. Gratitude is an attitude that means focussing on the things you're grateful for and making the decision to think about what makes you happy instead of what makes you sad.

So at the end of each day, try writing down three things that you are grateful for. That might be your health, it might be your friends and family, or it might be the cereal that you're having tomorrow. Really focus on that and make the decision to live in that moment for a bit.

Do this every day and you'll find that your mood improves, your positivity improves and much more!

We can take this further too. Try thinking each day about all the things that you want to do in the evenings. Did you know that being focused and excited about something can completely wake you up? Even make you less drunk?

When we get drunk, it's because of a neurotransmitter called GABA. Like melatonin, GABA is an inhibitory neurotransmitter, meaning that it makes us feel sleepy. It suppresses the activity of our individual neurons which both sedates us and eventually robs us of our higher level intelligence.

But if you've ever been drunk and something bad happened, then you might have noticed that you suddenly became more alert and aware. Suddenly you can take charge. Why? Because the brain is releasing excitatory neurotransmitters again to wake up those brain areas.

This very same thing can happen if you're just tired at the end of the day or if you're low on motivation. Start thinking about exciting, fun things to do in the evenings then and you will have more energy to make better use of that time!

And chances are that there are plenty of exciting things you *could* be doing in the evenings to gain more energy. The key is just being mindful of them.

So think about all the book and all the films that you own but haven't yet watched or read. Think about all the cool hobbies you'd like to learn. Think about all the things you can do outside – whether it means exploring local parks or trying out pubs/restaurants you haven't been to before. Have you ever been inside the public library near you? Did you know you can look through photos of Mars that no one else has ever seen before at Planet 4.org?

The point is, that we spend a lot of time stressed and working hard and being exhausted in the evenings. But that's because we never stop to realize that life is great right now. We don't need to keep working 'toward' something. We need to stand still long enough to enjoy what we already have!

Language and Mindfulness

Another way you can use mindfulness is to change your language. Your language causes certain neurons to fire when you speak it and when others hear it. Essentially, language directs thought.

So the types of words you use and the types of things you say can end up drastically impacting on the way you feel. If you want to change the way you think then, one thing you can do is to change the way you talk.

To do this, you just need to identify what it is about your language that you want to change. Perhaps you want to stop being negative? In this case, you might make the rule that you won't say anything negative for X amount of time. And any time you *do* say something negative, you need to qualify that statement with something positive.

It can be hard to remember to do this at first though – mindfulness takes a lot of work because we are normally so distracted. So to help yourself along, try wearing a wrist band or something that will remind you. The great thing is that the wrist band doesn't need to say anything on it – as long as *you* know what it's for.

And what happens when you do this? Simple: you start to feel a lot more positive and you get into the habit of being much more positive. Better yet, other people will think of you as more positive too and they'll feel happier being around you.

You can use all kinds of other changes like this too. For example, if you want to increase your self-compassion, then you can simply try to be less negative about yourself. Every time you catch yourself saying something derogatory about yourself, change that by focussing on what it is that you like about yourself. Again, qualify the statement and give it a positive twist.

Meditation Practice

Making all these changes in your life and being this much more mindful of the way you think isn't easy at first. This is why it's something you also need to practice and this is where the meditation aspect comes in.

To use mindfulness meditation, your aim is simply to detach yourself from your thoughts – not to stop them. You are to watch them go past like clouds and simply by doing this, you'll find you get some great respite and a chance to recharge your batteries each day.

But as you practice this over time, you'll find that it starts to bleed into your everyday life. You learn to be permanently less attached and less affected by your thoughts and to instead rise above them. At the same time, you learn to be in much better control of what you think at any given time and to change it when necessary.

Practice for a while – 10 minutes a day – and you'll find you become a calmer, happier and more effective person.

We go over all this and much more in greater detail in the full *The Power of Mindfulness* ebook. There you will find detailed instructions on how to meditate, as well as more guidance on how to apply these principles to every area of your life so you can improve your health, become more confident, date anyone and even gain more strength by becoming more focussed on your workouts!

See you over there!