

Mindfulness: 5 Secrets To Happiness

Sometimes it seems like your brain just sits around creating lousy feelings and worries. You want this, you're frustrated about that, you're annoyed about some other thing and the list never stops. And it makes it impossible to be happy.

What would be nice is to have a perspective that helps your brain deal with all of these negative emotions. And there may be one — and you've probably heard the name a lot lately: *Mindfulness*. And **research** shows it works. Here are 5 ways to be mindful:

1) Watch Your Mind For 5 Minutes

It just ping-pongs all over the place. And when you're moody, it takes everything so seriously. If this was a character in a movie you'd laugh at them for not seeing the pattern and continuing to take each thing so seriously. But normally you don't notice it. And I don't need to add that this is no prescription for happiness.

People spend 46.9 percent of their waking hours thinking about something other than what they're doing, and this mind-wandering typically makes them unhappy... "Mind-wandering is an excellent predictor of people's happiness," Killingsworth says. "In fact, how often our minds leave the present and where they tend to go is a better predictor of our happiness than the activities in which we are engaged."... Time-lag analyses conducted by the researchers suggested that their subjects' mind-wandering was generally the cause, not the consequence, of their unhappiness.

Now that you're aware this is going on, what can you do to stop your mind from bouncing around taking all these negative thoughts so seriously? First you need to understand something...

2) You Are Not Your Thoughts

Neuroscientist **Alex Korb** made an interesting distinction **when I spoke to him**. If you were to break your arm you would not tell people, "I am broken." But when we feel anger we're quick to say, "I am angry."

And this causes a *lot* of unhappiness. Your arm lifts stuff. Just like your brain produces thoughts. That's what it does. And as you well know, some of those thoughts are *ridiculous*. That doesn't mean that's who you are.

This distinction is central to mindfulness. Here's Joseph Goldstein:

Anybody who's paid any attention to their minds will know throughout the day there's a run of thoughts going through our heads. Usually, we're quite caught up in them and identified with them. We take them to be who we are. Without mindfulness, we're lost in the dream of our thoughts in these mind created worlds and we're not even aware that that's what's happening, we're so enmeshed in them.

You already know this... but selectively. Sometimes, you'll say, "I'm not really angry, I'm just tired." Boom. That's a teensy bit of mindfulness right there. (See? You're already good at it.)

You need to do this more often, rather than assuming just because it's in your head, it's you and it's to be taken seriously.

I look at it like this: "See and not be." Recognize the worries, frustrations or fears as *just thoughts*. They don't have to be you.

Okay, we know the thoughts are just thoughts. But what do we do once we see'em?

3) Label Your Thoughts And Feelings

Okay, you're not your thoughts but they are still there. Give the feeling a name. Label it.

"*I'm feeling angry.*" or "*I'm feeling worried.*"

Naming it helps you frame it and separate it from being “you.” And it can reduce the emotional component and help you relax. Here’s Joseph:

It’s almost like a frame around a picture. The point is not to look at the frame, but the frame helps focus our attention so we see the picture more clearly.

But what’s the point of all this? *To allow yourself to deal with your thoughts effectively and make better decisions in your life which will make you happier and more productive.* And that comes down to a very simple principle...

4) Don’t Just React To Thoughts. Decide.

You have emotional thoughts, you assume they are “you” and BOOM, you immediately act based on them...

And so you probably just said things you don’t mean and did things that will make you unhappy in the long term, right? (The word “impulsive” is rarely a compliment.)

Following your heart is good. But first we need to *train* the heart, or we may follow impulsive desires that get us into trouble.

Contrary to some popular beliefs, our aim should be not to follow the heart but to train the heart. All of us have a mix of motivations; not everything in our hearts is wise or wholesome. The great power of mindful discernment allows us to abandon what is unwholesome and to cultivate the good. This discernment is of inestimable value for our happiness and wellbeing.

Before you impulsively react to a thought (and maybe blurt out something stupid or do something rash), just ask yourself one simple question:

“Is it useful?”

Here’s Joseph:

Where is this action leading? Do I want to go there? ...This thought which has arisen, is it helpful? Is it serving me or others in some way or is it not? Is it just playing out perhaps old conditions of fear or judgment or things that are not very helpful for ourselves or others? Mindfulness really helps us both see and discern the difference and then it becomes the foundation then for making wiser choices and why the choices lead to more happiness. It’s really simple. It’s not easy to do, but it’s very simple.

So we’ve dealt a lot with how mindfulness helps you cope with the negative. Enough defense. Time for some offense. How does mindfulness boost happiness?

5) Be Compassionate

Mindfulness makes compassion easier. How, you ask? Well, if you faint at the sight of blood, you won’t be a good surgeon.

To be compassionate you have to be able to get close to someone’s pain. But often this is too intense. It hurts to see someone you love suffer. Your brain’s impulsive reaction can be: “PAIN BAD. RUN AWAY.”

You need to not be overwhelmed by the feeling in order to remedy it and mindfulness helps you keep that distance so you can be of help.