

The 5 Mindset Keys

While there are many ways to train your brain to be more mindful, we at the Anticancer Lifestyle Program suggest some ways to get started in these 5 Mindset Keys.

1. Pause and take three conscious breaths, often.

This deceptively simple exercise will increase your skill and confidence in taking a moment to focus on the present. To do this well, pause the action of the day and focus on the process of breathing. Inhale slowly, on the count of 4. Find the sensations of your lungs and chest filling with air when you inhale; it can help to place a hand on your belly to feel the rise and fall of each breath. Then feel the air escape slowly on the exhale. Repeat this three times. At first, try to do this 3 times a day, once in the morning, afternoon, and evening. You can slowly increase the number of times you do this each day.

2. Practice being silent for a few minutes each day.

This practice will give your brain the opportunity to restore so that you can better focus on being present. Aim to find some time to rest in silence with a quiet mind for a few minutes each day. The busy-ness of the world and your own thoughts will all be waiting for you when you turn back to them! But with this practice your mind and spirit will be a little more refreshed when you do.

3. Observe yourself and others with compassion and without judgment.

Think about a time when you might have harshly judged someone else's behavior instead of viewing them with compassion, only to discover later that your assumptions were not correct. This kind of review isn't about giving yourself a hard time; it's a chance to notice how your mindset can color your impression of others. Likewise, it's important to bring a sense of generosity and kindness to yourself. Talk to yourself as you would talk to someone you deeply cared for.

4. With practice, you can experience any activity mindfully.

Being mindful requires an awareness that comes from purposefully paying attention to what you are currently experiencing. Any activity—from mopping the floor to writing a report to playing with a child—can be done mindfully. Mindfulness allows thoughts about the past and the future to stay in the background or even fade away. As you begin the practice, you will learn to recognize when your mind wanders, and how to call it back to the here and now. Imagine the thoughts about the past or the future to be guests knocking at your door — you can choose to not open the door to let them in. After a while, they will quiet down. Recognize that developing the awareness needed to be mindful takes time and practice.

5. Success is doing the practice, no matter what you experience on a given day.

You'll know you have been successful in your mindfulness practice when you notice your level of frustration and stress going down. For instance, instead of getting upset about being stuck in traffic, you might soon be able to take several conscious breaths and come to the realization that the traffic will eventually lessen and, as long as you remain aware of your present situation, you'll arrive where you are going safe and sound. This situation can present a good moment to practice your compassion too, as you look around at the other drivers and realize they're not happy about this either! As you continue your mindful practice, accept that mindfulness is not aimed at changing what you experience, rather it is aimed at changing how you experience it.