



**The Community Technical Assistance Center**  
EFFICIENT PRACTICES. EFFECTIVE CARE.

# Healing Through Mindfulness

## Incorporating Mindful Strategies into Practice

### Tool Kit







# **Five Obstacles to Mindfulness and How to Overcome Them**

with  
Sharon Salzberg

The National Institute  
for the Clinical Application  
of Behavioral Medicine

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# Five Obstacles to Mindfulness and How to Overcome Them

with Sharon Salzberg

The five obstacles to mindfulness are known as Grasping which is greed and attachment, Aversion which is anger and fear, Sleepiness, Restlessness and Doubt.

## Grasping

*Grasping* comes up because so much of our lives can revolve around what we *don't* have, often to the point where we ignore what we *do* have. Or it might be that something lovely is happening and we just grab onto it and we strategize right away, “How can I keep this? How can I keep it from ever changing?” which of course will never work.

So you might be sitting there minding your own business, feeling your breath, and this big wave of grasping comes up. It is very, very common.

## Aversion

And the same is true for aversion (or anger and fear).

People get pretty sensitive – just like in a psychotherapeutic process. We notice things that have been driving us unconsciously. They are almost intensified in our awareness and so we tend to see a lot. It wouldn't be surprising at all to have large amounts of anger and fear come up in the course of practice.

## Sleepiness

When things are even, not big ups and downs, not very pleasant or very unpleasant, we tend to get bored and go to sleep. Sometimes it is only when people stop to meditate that they realize how incredibly fatigued they are because they've been going and going and going.

Sleepiness can also be a habit pattern or mechanism. When something difficult is coming up we think, “Oh, I'll just take a nap!”

Sometimes as we meditate and get calmer, more tranquil and peaceful, there is not enough sheer energy in our system to try and balance it out.

## Restlessness

Restlessness is the opposite problem. There is *too much* energy for the amount of calm or peace that is in our system. Sometimes restlessness is very physical. We feel all this energy moving through our body, like we want to jump out of our skin. Sometimes it's psychological. We find ourselves planning and planning . . . often planning the same thing. We may fixate on a time of regret in our lives and go over and over it.

## Doubt

The last hindrance, as they are called, is the state of doubt. Doubt is very tricky because if it is the right kind of doubt, it is a very important and even precious quality. We really need to investigate. We need to find out for ourselves. We don't want to be gullible. We don't want to take anyone else's word for what is the truth of our experience. We always need to be questioning.

But there is a kind of doubt that is more like defeatism – “I can't do it. Everyone else can do it,” “Should I do this or should I do that,” or “Well, I was wondering that last week too!”

## Overcoming Obstacles

Each of these five obstacles can come up very frequently. The key mechanism for working with them is mindfulness. It is *Recognizing, Accepting, Investigating* and *Non-identifying* with these states themselves.

There are ways to address each state. For example, if sleepiness or restlessness are born from a kind of energetic imbalance, we work to address that. If we are very sleepy, we might need more energy. It might mean walking meditation instead of sitting meditation. It might mean sitting with your eyes open.

There is a very famous list from the Buddha that I have always liked, about dealing with sleepiness. It starts with opening your eyes, maybe standing up, or watching the quality of your aim. For example, if you are trying to be with this breath in the next 50 breaths, you will likely go to sleep. But if you have this feeling or even saying in your mind, “Just this one breath. Just this one,” it will pick up your energy and really clarify the experience.

Then I noticed that the very last thing on the list is “take a nap” which I always appreciated. I took note of the fact that while it was on the list, it wasn't the very first thing on the list.

## Repetition and Add-ons

Ancient pedagogy is full of repetition. I think about the 70,000 times I heard about the hindrances and how they were normal.

They were very normalized in that environment – “Yes, you are going to experience this. This is natural. Everybody experiences this. There are ways of dealing with it. Don't forget about it.” I think that kind of knowledge, and bringing it up again and again is very helpful.

The trick is to experience it as it really is to try to distinguish the feeling or the moment from the story we tell about it. For example, “This is going to last for ever. This is who I really am.”

Sometimes in meditation practice we say, “Look for the add-ons. What am I adding on to this experience? What is happening right now and what am I adding on?” And then we see if we can relinquish some of the add-ons. We are sometimes left with a very uncomfortable experience, but it is a very direct and awakened awareness.



# 6 Simple Practices from the Masters

with

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## 6 Simple Practices from the Masters

### **Metta Meditation** with Sylvia Boorstein, PhD

One of the practices that I have is to be in touch with how I'm feeling. When I'm not feeling good, I try to have good intentions for myself.

I have a rubric that I say to myself: "May I feel safe; may I feel content; may I feel strong; may I be at ease; may I feel safe, may I feel content..." Sometimes I say, "May I feel happy; may I feel strong; may I be at ease." I've said that to myself thousands of times as part of a meditation exercise.

When I realize I'm unhappy in a situation, it starts by itself like a little metronome in the mind. I can be listening, I can be talking, and in the back of my mind it's playing my soothing words, "May I feel safe; may I feel content; may I feel strong; may I live with ease..."

It focuses my attention because I've given my attention something more than being neutral. I've given it something positive, soothing, and trustworthy to balance itself on. This allows you to catch your balance when you're shaky.

### **Cultivating Attention** with Joan Borysenko, PhD

Dan Siegel, MD has a great exercise to do before you sit and do a mindfulness meditation, and it goes like this: "Put your attention on the wall in back of you. Now, put your attention on the wall in front of you. Now bring it to the middle of the room. Finally, bring it inside."

That is a teaching in and of itself because you realize you get to choose where your attention goes. It doesn't have to get hijacked by everything that goes by. Attention is a choice.

Mindfulness is like a microscope that allows you to hone in, but it allows you to have a greater depth of field so that you see more.

Here's an example of that. There was a time during World War II when one of the intelligence agencies was recruiting spies. The test for how good a spy you would be was this: they would put you in a waiting room and then, when they brought you in for your interview, they would simply ask you questions like, "What did you see in the waiting room? Did you notice the color of the couch? Did you notice the scents? Did you notice a crooked picture hanging?" They would ask any question like this.

It's like finding Waldo – to practice pattern recognition, which is what mindfulness really is. Take a break during your day: How many sounds do you hear in the room right now?

Take a break during the day just for thirty seconds. What's going on in your body? Are your shoulders like concrete? Is your back starting to hurt?

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# LOVING-KINDNESS MEDITATION

Difficulty: **MODERATE** | Frequency: **1X/DAY** | Duration: **15 MINS**



## WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

Practicing kindness is one of the most direct routes to happiness: Research suggests that kind people tend to be more satisfied with their relationships and with their lives in general. We all have a natural capacity for kindness, but sometimes we don't take steps to nurture and express this capacity as much as we could.

Loving-kindness meditation (sometimes called “metta” meditation) is a great way to cultivate our propensity for kindness. It involves mentally sending goodwill, kindness, and warmth towards others by silently repeating a series of mantras.

## TIME REQUIRED

15 minutes daily

## HOW TO DO IT

This exercise draws on a guided meditation created by researcher Emma Seppala, Science Director of Stanford University's [Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education](#).

We recommend listening to the audio of this guided meditation in the player below; you can read more about it on [Dr. Seppala's website](#). We have included a script of the meditation to help you follow it yourself or teach it to others.

### Body Position

Close your eyes. Sit comfortably with your feet flat on the floor and your spine straight. Relax your whole body. Keep your eyes closed throughout the whole visualization and bring your awareness inward. Without straining or concentrating, just relax and gently follow the instructions.

Take a deep breath in. And breathe out.

### Receiving Loving-Kindness

Keeping your eyes closed, think of a person close to you who loves you very much. It could be someone from the past or the present; someone still in life or who has passed; it could be a spiritual teacher or guide. Imagine that person standing on your right side, sending you their love. That person is sending you wishes for your safety, for your well-being and happiness. Feel

the warm wishes and love coming from that person towards you.

Now bring to mind the same person or another person who cherishes you deeply. Imagine that person standing on your left side, sending you wishes for your wellness, for your health and happiness. Feel the kindness and warmth coming to you from that person.

Now imagine that you are surrounded on all sides by all the people who love you and have loved you. Picture all of your friends and loved ones surrounding you. They are standing sending you wishes for your happiness, well-being, and health. Bask in the warm wishes and love coming from all sides. You are filled, and overflowing with warmth and love.

### **Sending Loving-Kindness to Loved Ones**

Now bring your awareness back to the person standing on your right side. Begin to send the love that you feel back to that person. You and this person are similar. Just like you, this person wishes to be happy. Send all your love and warm wishes to that person.

Repeat the following phrases, silently:

*May you live with ease, may you be happy, may you be free from pain.*

*May you live with ease, may you be happy, may you be free from pain.*

*May you live with ease, may you be happy, may you be free from pain.*

Now focus your awareness on the person standing on your left side. Begin to direct the love within you to that person. Send all your love and warmth to that person. That person and you are alike. Just like you, that person wishes to have a good life.

Repeat the following phrases, silently:

*Just as I wish to, may you be safe, may you be healthy, may you live with ease and happiness.*

*Just as I wish to, may you be safe, may you be healthy, may you live with ease and happiness.*

*Just as I wish to, may you be safe, may you be healthy, may you live with ease and happiness.*

Now picture another person that you love, perhaps a relative or a friend. This person, like you, wishes to have a happy life. Send warm wishes to that person.

Repeat the following phrases, silently:

*May your life be filled with happiness, health, and well-being.*

*May your life be filled with happiness, health, and well-being.*

*May your life be filled with happiness, health, and well-being.*

### **Sending Loving-Kindness to Neutral People**

Now think of an acquaintance, someone you don't know very well and toward whom you do not have any particular feeling. You and this person are alike in your wish to have a good life.

Send all your wishes for well-being to that person, repeating the following phrases, silently:

*Just as I wish to, may you also live with ease and happiness.*

*Just as I wish to, may you also live with ease and happiness.*

*Just as I wish to, may you also live with ease and happiness.*

Now bring to mind another acquaintance toward whom you feel neutral. It could be a neighbor, or a colleague, or someone else that you see around but do not know very well. Like you, this person wishes to experience joy and well-being in his or her life.

Send all your good wishes to that person, repeating the following phrases, silently:

*May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be free from all pain.*

*May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be free from all pain.*

*May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be free from all pain.*

### **Sending Loving-Kindness to All Living Beings**

Now expand your awareness and picture the whole globe in front of you as a little ball.

Send warm wishes to all living beings on the globe, who, like you, want to be happy:

*Just as I wish to, may you live with ease, happiness, and good health.*

*Just as I wish to, may you live with ease, happiness, and good health.*

*Just as I wish to, may you live with ease, happiness, and good health.*

Take a deep breath in. And breathe out. And another deep breath in and let it go. Notice the state of your mind and how you feel after this meditation.

When you're ready, you may open your eyes.

## **EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS**

Fredrickson, B. L., Cohn, M. A., Coffey, K. A., Pek, J., & Finkel, S. M. (2008). [Open hearts build lives: Positive emotions, induced through loving-kindness meditation, build consequential personal resources](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95, 1045-1062.

People who practiced loving-kindness meditation daily for seven weeks reported a steady increase in their daily experience of positive emotions, such as joy, gratitude, contentment, hope, and love. They also reported greater life satisfaction and lower depressive symptoms following the intervention, compared to when they started. People who were on a waitlist to learn the

practice didn't report these benefits.

Other evidence for the effectiveness of this practice can be found on [Dr. Emma Seppala's website](#).

## WHY IT WORKS

Loving-kindness meditation increases happiness in part by making people feel more connected to others—to loved ones, acquaintances, and even strangers. Research suggests that when people practice loving-kindness meditation regularly, they start automatically reacting more positively to others—and their social interactions and close relationships become more satisfying. Loving-kindness meditation can also reduce people's focus on themselves—which can, in turn, lower symptoms of anxiety and depression.

## SOURCES

[Emma Seppala, Ph.D.](#), Stanford University

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This practice is part of [Greater Good in Action](#), a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the [Greater Good Science Center](#) at UC Berkeley and [HopeLab](#).







# GUIDED IMAGERY SCRIPT

**Directions:** It helps to turn the lights down and have soft music in the background.

We are going to do an exercise to help us relax and get us ready for our next task. Most of you have probably done some sort of guided imagery before. Some like it, others don't. Regardless of your past experience, I encourage you to be open to the chance that this might help us see some new possibilities.

You don't have to do any part of the process that you are uncomfortable with. For instance, I will be suggesting you close your eyes. If you are not comfortable with that, you can keep your eyes open.

I will be putting you through a few simple exercises to help you relax. It will only take a few minutes. Then we will continue with our work.

Now, I'd like to ask you to sit up straight in your chair, with both feet on the floor. Put anything down that you may be holding. If you are wearing glasses, take them off. Rest your hands comfortably on your legs. Close your eyes and be still for a moment (Pause about 30 seconds and allow people to be still, then continue).

Now pay attention to your breathing. Slow your breathing somewhat and exhale slightly longer than you inhale. (Pause for 30 seconds while people slow their breathing, then continue).

Now, we will move through your body, relaxing your various body parts. First your toes. Tense your toes up now. (Have people tense each body part for about 10 seconds) Now release the tension. Notice the difference.

Tense your calf and lower leg muscles. Now release the tension. Notice the difference.

Tense your thighs and upper leg muscles. Now release the tension. Notice the difference.

Tense the muscles in your buttocks. Now release the tension. Notice the difference.

The lower part of your body is now relaxed.

Tense your abdominal muscles. Now release the tension. Notice the difference.





Gently pull your head back as if to look at the ceiling. Hold for about 5 seconds, and release, feeling the tension melting away.

Pause for about 10 seconds.

Now feel the weight of your relaxed head and neck sink.

Breath in...and out.

In...and out.

Let go of all the stress

In...and out.

Now, tightly, but without straining, clench your fists and hold this position until I say stop. Hold for about 5 seconds, and release.

Pause for about 10 seconds.

Now, flex your biceps. Feel that buildup of tension. You may even visualize that muscle tightening. Hold for about 5 seconds, and release, enjoying that feeling of limpness.

Breath in...and out.

Now tighten your triceps by extending your arms out and locking your elbows. Hold for about 5 seconds, and release.

Pause for about 10 seconds.

Now lift your shoulders up as if they could touch your ears. Hold for about 5 seconds, and quickly release, feeling their heaviness.

Pause for about 10 seconds.

Tense your upper back by pulling your shoulders back trying to make your shoulder blades touch. Hold for about 5 seconds, and release.

Pause for about 10 seconds.

Tighten your chest by taking a deep breath in, hold for about 5 seconds, and exhale, blowing out all the tension.

