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Self-Care

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Self-Care

ALL-IN-ONE

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Self-Care All-in-One For Dummies®

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Introduction

Life in the 21st century is hectic and stressful — which is why taking care of yourself is more important than ever. You can't care for others if you don't take care of yourself! *Self-Care All-in-One For Dummies* is here to help you build and consistently use healthy, uplifting, and fulfilling habits.

About This Book

Self-Care All-in-One For Dummies provides guidance, tools, and resources for incorporating self-care practices into your busy everyday life. Here, you get tips on practicing mindfulness, building self-compassion and resilience, starting a fitness routine, eating clean, managing stress, and living a lower-tech life.

A quick note: Sidebars (shaded boxes of text) dig into the details of a given self-care technique or topic, but they aren't crucial to understanding it. Feel free to read them or skip them. You can pass over the text accompanied by the Technical Stuff icon, too. The text marked with this icon gives some interesting but nonessential information about a particular self-care method.

One last thing: Within this book, you may note that some web addresses break across two lines of text. If you're reading this book in print and want to visit one of these web pages, simply key in the web address exactly as it's noted in the text, pretending as though the line break doesn't exist. If you're reading this as an e-book, you've got it easy — just click the web address to be taken directly to the web page.

Foolish Assumptions

Here are some assumptions about why you're picking up this book:

- » You're looking for small yet meaningful steps to improve your overall wellbeing.
- » You want to manage stress and remain resilient in the face of daily challenges.
- » You want to develop the ability to quiet your inner critic and give yourself compassion.
- » You're interested in starting (or restarting) a fitness routine and clean eating habits.
- » You wonder whether you're spending too much time online and want proven methods for reducing your Internet activity.

Icons Used in This Book

Like all *For Dummies* books, this book features icons to help you navigate the information. Here's what they mean.



REMEMBER If you take away anything from this book, it should be the information marked with this icon.



TECHNICAL STUFF This icon flags information that digs a little deeper than usual into a given self-care practice.



TIP

This icon highlights especially helpful advice about starting or continuing a self-care practice.



WARNING

This icon points out situations and actions to avoid as you start taking better care of yourself.

Beyond the Book

In addition to the material in the print or e-book you're reading right now, this product comes with some access-anywhere goodies on the web. Check out the free Cheat Sheet for information on mindfulness, self-compassion, resilience, fitness, clean eating, stress management, and reducing online activity. To get this Cheat Sheet, simply go to www.dummies.com and search for “*Self-Care All-in-One For Dummies* Cheat Sheet” in the Search box.

Where to Go from Here

You don't have to read this book from cover to cover, but you can if you like! If you just want to find specific information on a type of self-care practice, take a look at the table of contents or the index, and then dive into the chapter or section that interests you.

For example, if you want the basics of mindfulness, go to [Book 1](#). If you want to explore self-compassion and resilience, check out [Books 2](#) and [3](#). If you prefer to find out more about fitness and clean eating, head to [Books 4](#) and [5](#). Stress getting you down? Flip to [Book 6](#). Or if you

want the scoop on living a lower-tech life, [Book 7](#) is the place to be.

No matter where you start, you'll find the information you need to take better care of yourself every day. Good luck!

Book 1

Being Present through Mindfulness

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Chapter 1

Discovering Mindfulness

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » **Defining mindfulness**
 - » **Exploring mindfulness meditation**
 - » **Discovering the benefits of mindfulness**
-

Mindfulness means flexibly paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, infused with qualities such as kindness, curiosity, acceptance, and openness.

Through being mindful, you discover how to live in the present moment in an enjoyable way rather than worrying about the past or being concerned about the future. The past has already gone and can't be changed. The future is yet to arrive and is completely unknown. The present moment, this very moment now, is ultimately the only moment you have. Mindfulness shows you how to live in this moment in a harmonious way. You find out how to make the present moment a more wonderful moment to be in — the only place in which you can create, decide, listen, think, smile, act, or live.

You can develop and deepen mindfulness through doing mindfulness meditation on a daily basis, from a few minutes to as long as you want. This chapter introduces you to mindfulness and mindfulness meditation and welcomes you aboard a fascinating journey.

Understanding the Meaning of Mindfulness



REMEMBER

Mindfulness was originally developed in ancient times, and can be found in Eastern and Western cultures. Mindfulness is a translation of the ancient Indian word *Sati*, which means awareness, attention, and remembering.

- » **Awareness:** This is an aspect of being human that makes you conscious of your experiences. Without awareness, nothing would exist for you.
- » **Attention:** Attention is a focused awareness; mindfulness training develops your ability to move and sustain your attention wherever and however you choose.
- » **Remembering:** This aspect of mindfulness is about remembering to pay attention to your experience from moment to moment. Being mindful is easy to forget. The word “remember” originally comes from the Latin *re* (“again”) and *memorari* (“be mindful of”).

Say that you want to practice mindfulness to help you cope with stress. At work, you think about your forthcoming presentation and begin to feel stressed and nervous. By becoming *aware* of this, you *remember* to focus your mindful *attention* to your own breathing rather than constantly worrying. Feeling your breath with a sense of warmth and gentleness helps slowly to calm you down.

Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, who first developed mindfulness in a therapeutic setting, says: “Mindfulness can be cultivated by paying attention in a specific way, that is, in the present moment, and as non-reactively, non-judgmentally and openheartedly as possible.”



REMEMBER You can break down the meaning even further:

- » **Paying attention:** To be mindful, you need to pay attention, whatever you choose to attend to.
- » **Present moment:** The reality of being in the here and now means you just need to be aware of the way things are, *as they are now*. Your experience is valid and correct just as it is.
- » **Non-reactively:** Normally, when you experience something, you automatically react to that experience according to your past conditioning. For example, if you think, “I still haven’t finished my work,” you react with thoughts, words, and actions in some shape or form.

Mindfulness encourages you to *respond* to your experience rather than *react* to thoughts. A reaction is automatic and gives you no choice; a response is deliberate and considered action.

- » **Non-judgmentally:** The temptation is to judge experience as good or bad, something you like or dislike. You want to feel bliss; you don’t like feeling afraid. Letting go of judgments helps you to see things as they are rather than through the filter of your personal judgments based on past conditioning.
- » **Openheartedly:** Mindfulness isn’t just an aspect of mind. Mindfulness is of the heart as well. To be open-

hearted is to bring a quality of kindness, compassion, warmth, and friendliness to your experience. For example, if you notice yourself thinking, “I’m useless at meditation,” you discover how to let go of this critical thought and gently turn your attention back to the focus of your meditation, whatever that may be.



REMEMBER

World-renowned monk Ajahn Brahm says the word *mindfulness* doesn’t capture the importance of kindness in the practice. So what word does he recommend? *Kindfulness*. This term can help remind you to bring a warm, friendly awareness when practicing mindfulness — and it just may make you smile too! Be sure to practice being kindful, not just mindful.

Looking at Mindfulness Meditation

Mindfulness meditation is a particular type of meditation that’s been well researched and tested in clinical settings.



REMEMBER

Meditation isn't thinking about nothing.

Meditation is kindly paying attention in a systematic way to whatever you decide to focus on, which can include awareness of your thoughts. By listening to your thoughts, you discover their habitual patterns. Your thoughts have a massive impact on your emotions and the decisions you make, so being more aware of them is helpful.

In mindfulness meditation, you typically focus on one, or a combination, of the following:

- » The feeling of your own breathing
- » Any one of your senses
- » Your body
- » Your thoughts or emotions
- » Your intentions
- » Whatever is most predominant in your awareness

Mindfulness meditation comes in two distinct types:

- » **Formal meditation:** This meditation is where you intentionally take time in your day to embark on a meditative practice. Time gives you an opportunity to deepen your mindfulness practice and understand more about your mind, its habitual tendencies, and how to be mindful for a sustained period of time, with a sense of kindness and curiosity toward yourself and your experience. Formal meditation is mind training.
- » **Informal meditation:** This is where you go into a focused and meditative state of mind as you go about your daily activities such as cooking, cleaning, walking

to work, talking to a friend, driving — anything at all. Think of it as everyday mindfulness. In this way, you continue to deepen your ability to be mindful, and train your mind to stay in the present moment more often rather than habitually straying into the past or future. Informal mindfulness meditation means you can rest in a mindful awareness at any time of day, whatever you're doing. See [Chapter 6](#) in Book 1 for more ways to be mindful informally.



REMEMBER

To practice meditation means to engage in the meditation exercise — not practicing in the sense of aiming one day to get the meditation perfect. You don't need to judge your meditation or perfect it in any way. Your experience is your experience. In this instance, practice doesn't mean rehearsal.



WARNING

Mindfulness is not just about having your attention caught — it's about cultivating a flexible attention. Flexible attention means you can choose where to focus your attention. For example, when a child (or adult!) is playing a computer game, they may have their full attention on the game, but the attention is usually not flexible. Their attention is caught by the game. That's not mindfulness. As you become more mindful, you're able to move your attention from one place to the other more in a flexible way.

Using Mindfulness to Help You

You know how you get lost in thought? Most of the day, as you go about your daily activities, your mind is left to think whatever it wants. You're operating on "automatic pilot" (explained more fully in [Chapter 4](#) of Book 1). But some of your automatic thoughts may be unhelpful to you, or perhaps you're so stuck in those thoughts that you don't actually experience the world around you. For example, you go for a walk in the park to relax, but your mind is lost in thoughts about your next project. First, you're not really living in the present moment, and second, you're making yourself more stressed, anxious, or depressed if your thoughts are unhelpful.

Mindfulness isn't focused on fixing problems. Mindfulness emphasizes acceptance first, and change may or may not come later. So if you suffer from anxiety, mindfulness shows you how to accept the feeling of anxiety rather than denying or fighting the feeling, and through this approach change naturally comes about. Consider this idea: "What you resist, persists. What you accept, transforms."

This section explores the many ways in which mindfulness can help you.



WARNING In mindfulness, acceptance means to *acknowledge* your present-moment experience, whether pleasant or unpleasant, is already here. You're discovering how to "make peace" with your present-moment experience rather than fighting it. Acceptance

doesn't mean resignation or giving up. Acceptance is an active and empowering state of mind.

Allowing space to heal

When you have a physical illness, it can be a distressing time. Your condition may be painful or even life-threatening. Perhaps your illness means you're no longer able to do the simple things in life you took for granted before, such as run up the stairs or look after yourself in an independent way. Illness can shake you to your very core. How can you cope with this? How can you build your inner strength to manage the changes that take place, without being overwhelmed and losing all hope?

High levels of stress, particularly over a long period of time, have been clearly shown to reduce the strength of your immune system. Perhaps you went down with the flu after a period of high stress. The scientific evidence strongly agrees. For example, research on care-givers who experience high levels of stress for long periods of time shows that they have a weaker immune system in response to diseases like the flu.

Mindfulness reduces stress, and for this reason is one way of managing illness. By reducing your stress you improve the effectiveness of your immune system, and this may help increase the rate of healing from the illness you suffer, especially if the illness is stress-related.



REMEMBER

Mindfulness can reduce stress, anxiety, pain, and depression, and boost energy, creativity, the quality of relationships, and your overall sense of wellbeing. The more you engage in mindfulness, the better: monks who've practiced mindfulness all their lives