



Guidance for Continued Practice for Graduates of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Course

Tasting Mindfulness

Have you ever had the experience of stopping so completely?
of being in your body so completely,
of being in your life so completely
that what you knew and what you didn't know
that what had been and what was yet to come,
and the way things are right now
no longer held even the slightest hint of anxiety or discord?
It would be a moment of complete presence, beyond striving,
beyond mere acceptance,
beyond the desire to escape or fix anything or plunge ahead,
a moment of pure seeing, pure feeling,
a moment in which life simply is,
and that "isness" grabs you by all your senses,
all your memories, by all your very genes,
by your loves, and
welcomes you home.

–Jon Kabat-Zinn, Founder of the MBSR Program

Dear MBSR Graduate,

We at East Coast Mindfulness (ECM) congratulate you for completing the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course. We hope you've experienced benefit from cultivating good-hearted attention to life, and what it means to bring yourself fully to the moments you have left to live. Remember: the MBSR course has been an entry into the practice of mindfulness, which you can choose to deepen. Here are some ideas and resources to support you in that deepening.

Consistent Practice

Mindfulness practice starts off feeling like a doing, an activity, and eventually becomes a less effortful way of meeting all experiences we encounter. This doesn't mean we get better at tuning out or adapting a "whatever"/lazy kind of attitude; it means we can get better at inviting ourselves to be fully present, grounded, and engaged from a larger sense of being that is willing to take in the entirety of life without judgment.

A consistent formal practice of mindfulness, as well as informal moment-by-moment practice, is important to bring about this grounded, engaged way of living.

Sitting (5, 10, 20, or more minutes, once or twice each day)

Arrange yourself grounded and uplifted, setting the intention to be awake, relaxed, and breathing freely. Choose a way to develop concentration and open, spacious awareness by settling on one, or a sequential unfolding, of these instructions during a given sitting. Return attention again and again, gently and precisely, when the mind wanders from your chosen area of focus:

- Resting attention on breathing
- Resting attention on body sensations
- Resting attention on body as a whole
- Resting attention on thoughts and feelings as they arise and pass away—not becoming involved with thoughts, just seeing them as events in the field of consciousness
- Noticing that attention drifts from objects of concentration, and gently, firmly bringing attention back; if attending to an object is too challenging or not called for, using breath or some other object as "home base" for a time, and returning to the object of attending when experience has settled enough to allow that
- Using the techniques as needed, and also exploring choiceless awareness: allowing all experience to be as it is, as it arises and subsides

It's helpful to sit quietly in this way consistently. By practicing consistently, you allow a sense of commitment, strength, and balance to develop in your life, which goes beyond moods, preferences, emotional turmoil, and busyness, and beyond the particular experiences—pleasant or painful—in your formal mindfulness practice and in your life.

A sense of "being" can be experienced whether you're feeling happy or otherwise, whether you're still or whether you're moving, and so on. Awareness of each moment, and the simple

remembering of your completeness and wholeness in each moment, will be cultivated by both your formal practice and the everyday moments of your life.

Whenever you notice yourself resisting or avoiding a planned period of practice, bring attention to the resistance itself. If this is what is happening for you right now, make it an equally worthy object of your attention—gently and precisely.

By committing to observe experience in this way, you will establish a more relaxed, engaged, realistic way of living. Use the sitting meditation recording from your MBSR course as often as you like to reinforce your regular sitting meditation practice.

Body Scan

The Body Scan encourages you to feel at home in your own body, in your own skin. This feeling goes beyond any given external circumstances, particular sensations, and/or thoughts about your body. You may experience times of tension and unpleasantness, as well as times of relaxation and pleasure. Bringing attention gently and precisely to the body allows you to develop a deeper sense of balance, presence, and kindness toward your body. There is a profound wisdom to this sense, and to gaining appreciation and kindness to your body.

You can notice a great deal of valuable information through the ability you have developed to body scan: tension, pain, body posture, and more. When you notice tension in specific regions of the body, bring awareness and spaciousness to the sensation, sensing how the sensation may change. You may do this at any time, under any circumstance. When you notice pain or difficulty that calls for action, take action efficiently and with care, in a way that feels supportive of your body and your life.

Bringing awareness to the body is all that is required, and having a willingness to pay attention to how the body is. You can be aware of the breath as well, paying attention to when breathing is full and deep, and what conditions cause it to become shallow, rapid, labored, or difficult.

The Body Scan can continue to be an important part of your practice of awareness. Growing the neurological connections between your brain and all areas and systems of your body deepens your ability to remain sensitive, present, and connected to what's happening for you, moment by moment. Continue to use the Body Scan recording as much as you like, and also continue to practice without the recording. Modify the length and frequency as various situations call for, to make this practice your own.

Walking

Along with the formal practices we engaged in together, we learned that it's equally valuable to cultivate attention in our regular "walking-around" time. It's a good idea to notice opportunities to bring mindfulness to walking. Whenever you notice the chance, notice your pace, your breath, and the sensations of walking; notice the conditions around you and your thoughts and emotions; then, begin to, or continue to, move into the action called for with walking or whatever activity you are engaged in.

If you are walking, notice your feet, legs, torso and head balancing, arms gently swinging. Open your awareness to the sights and sounds around you, and to the thoughts and emotions that arise with all of these sensations. If you notice awareness drifting off into a thought stream, bring awareness back to the breath or the feet on the ground, and then bring mindfulness back to this moment, this activity.

Mindful Eating

Paying attention to what you eat, and what effect the food and drink you choose has on your mind and body is important. You can pay attention to the quality and quantity of food you offer your body, and motivations when you eat or drink. Are you consuming to nourish and sustain your body? To distract yourself, to entertain yourself, to satisfy cravings for taste sensations? To feel more full, more complete? Are you aware of the source of your food, how it was produced and what impact production has on the people and environments involved? Is your food processed, and if so, what has been added or taken away? How do different types and sources of food leave your body feeling? What effects do those feelings have on your emotions and thoughts?

As often as is possible, structure the opportunity to eat with relaxed awareness, perhaps somewhat slower than usual. You could try eating one silent meal per week, or you could commit to spending the first five minutes of every meal quietly noticing what you can about smells, textures, tastes, and the effect of eating on your entire being. You might consider refraining from reading or watching television while you eat, in order to feel the experience more intimately. Bringing attention in these ways will help you become more sensitive to your eating habits and the effects they have on you.

Mindful Movement/Yoga

It is important to move, with awareness and with a sense of appreciation and commitment to caring for your body. Try to do a period of easeful yoga-type stretching as regularly as you can. You could vary the postures to attend to the whole range of motion of the body regularly. Use either of the movement audios as often as you like, and also try to do the movement unguided. Remember to breathe throughout.

See if you can also find a way, each day, to check in with how your body's feeling and whether it is getting what it needs for exercise, nutrition, and rest. Ask yourself, How am I doing physically? Can I know about this by tuning into my body? Is there anything I need that I haven't stopped to notice? What is that? Become the main steward and expert around the day-to-day care and feeding of this precious resource: your own body.

Noticing and Addressing Stress

Remember that you are a complete being just as you are. The ability to remember that you are whole, complete as you are, with all you need to live as yourself: this is your greatest ally in mindfulness. As often as possible, bring attention "beyond" activities and thoughts—to

awareness that is always clear, strong, and grounded in peace and stillness. Notice that there is a greater perspective that can hold difficult thought and experience without judgment.

Notice thoughts or feelings that undermine your connection to your essential moment-by-moment wholeness and wellness. Notice feelings of like/dislike, wanting/rejecting. When these feelings are present, be aware of how they are expressed through your words and actions—for instance, through tone of voice, body language, choices to engage/disengage. Notice your behaviors and the effects that result in a larger context. If you are in a particular mood, does this color how you speak to others, and how you view the particular conditions around you? Is what arises in your mind about the world really true?

Bring awareness to the connection between your moods, thoughts, and reactions, and how you feel physically. Tune in to how you move and to the positions your body takes, facial expressions you present, how much you talk and what you say, and how you feel as you interface with the world.

Notice how much your thoughts stray without your control to the past and the future, to times and places that you have no means to effect or need to control. Notice how much of your thinking revolves around “I” “me” and “mine.” Notice how much of the day is spent calculating how you can cater to, and reinforce, this “Me” aspect of your being. Is this necessary? Do you spend time suffering about things that this “Me” character wants, doesn’t want, is complaining about, or yearning for?

Be aware of the judging mind, both toward yourself and others. Notice the effect on you physically and emotionally, and ask whether this is productive or in tune with how you want to spend your time.

Be mindful of physical, emotional, and thought-based cues that signal that a particular situation is stressful for you. Call to mind the ever-present possibility of choice rather than automatic reaction. Bring attention to your breath or some other object of attending available to you in the moment. Even a few seconds attending like this can make a big difference.

Make bringing awareness of breath, feet on the floor, or some other object, your home base, returning to it over and over as you move through your day. This helps ground you in the present moment. Practice it right now. Practice it when you are calm, to firmly establish this way of being, and practice it when you are not calm, to remind you that inviting more calm is an option when we remember in this way.

Tune in to the emotions you are feeling, how they are always coming and going. Consider the qualities of difficult emotions, such as the ones on the left of the table below. Is there a certain strength or tenacity to these when they come up? Notice how they might limit the choices you see available. Notice if lack of perspective and confusion accompanies them. Is there a way to pause when you notice these emotions, to access greater choice?

What do you notice about the qualities of pleasant emotions, when they happen? Are they as overwhelming, as limiting? How can they be best noticed, strengthened, nourished?

Afraid	Fearless
Angry	Joyful
Anxious	Calm
Envious	Happy for others
Lazy	Enthusiastic
Low energy	Full of energy for what needs doing
Agitated	Peaceful
Bored	Engaged
Worried, Insecure	Secure
Greedy	Satisfied
Hateful	Caring
Superior	Connected

What quality of thoughts do you find when experiencing difficult emotions? Are these thoughts permanently accurate? Can you know they are true, absolutely? What thoughts might you invite that would represent a more accurate picture of the whole truth? What thoughts better support your own sense of wellbeing and wholeness, as well as any others included in the situation?

Take time now and then to reflect on the choices you make, the people you surround yourself with and influence, the environments you frequent and have an effect on, the media you consume, the activities you pursue. Are these aligned with and supportive of your wholeness and wellbeing? What might it be like to refrain from any of these for a time, as an experiment in mindfulness? Consider the following dimensions of your life, and whether you are feeling well and whole within each of them. Is there anything that has been calling for your attention?

Spiritual

- Finding meaning and purpose in life
- Aligning to your personal values
- Touching into and tending to what is most essential and true for you

Physical

- Good nutrition, adequate sleep
- Avoiding behaviors that harm you (overeating, overworking, excess alcohol)
- Maintaining strength, cardiovascular endurance, and flexibility

Emotional

- Being aware of, and accepting of, feelings
- Using healthy coping strategies for meeting stress

Social

- Contributing to your community (family, living communities, world)

- Developing and maintaining healthy relationships
- Celebrating and enjoying what is pleasurable and meaningful

Occupational

- Gaining satisfaction and enrichment from work
- Contributing to a healthy work environment

Intellectual

- Engaging the mind in creative, stimulating mental activities
- Improving skills, expanding knowledge

Wellness is the conscious commitment to value and pay attention to all areas of our lives, in the best way we are able. Can you bring kindness and a commitment to yourself and the world, in each of these areas, as best you are able?

Remember that by cultivating mindfulness in your life, you are engaged in a process of learning and growing, amounting to a re-tuning of the nervous system and a total self re-education. Daniel Siegel names the overall sense of awareness and awakesness to our unfolding lives “mindsight.” In his book **Mindsight**, he tells us:

In our individual lives, mindsight offers us the opportunity to explore the subjective essence of who we are, to create a life of deeper meaning with a richer and more understandable internal world. With mindsight we are better able to balance our emotions, achieving an internal equilibrium that enables us to cope with the small and large stresses of our lives. Through our ability to focus attention, mindsight also helps the body and brain achieve homeostasis—the internal balance, coordination and adaptiveness that forms the core of health. Finally, mindsight can improve our relationships with our friends, colleagues, spouses, and children—and even the relationship we have with our own selves. (p. xiv)

Support of Community

You may have noticed during the course that it’s helpful to have the support and accountability of a group. It can be particularly helpful to be with people you can connect with, who understand and have perhaps been through some of what you find yourself facing.

ECM offers a free weekly Worldwide Online Sit, open to all and intended specifically for graduates of mindfulness courses. You can learn more about this and register to join us by visiting our website, here:

<https://www.eastcoastmindfulness.com/Programs/Online-Sit/>

Remember, as a graduate, you are always invited to come to the Retreat Classes that are held for current MBSR groups. We will send you notification about our upcoming Retreat Classes, as well as other offerings you might attend to support your ongoing practice. Please check our website to find out when our next Retreat Class will be held—

<https://eastcoastmindfulness.com/Programs/MBSR-Courses-Online/>

Also, as a graduate, you might decide to participate in a future MBSR course (we often have graduates engage again in the course). There is a reduced rate for graduates to retake the course.

You may find practice groups, teachers, and communities in your general geographic area. Look for a group that feels supportive of your learning and growth. Look for a teacher who embodies qualities you find to be of high integrity, someone who has an open, clear heart—and also provides you with an appropriate amount of challenge and motivation. Use the wisdom you’ve touched during these weeks to choose what feels most aligned with who you are.

You may also notice a desire to experience extended practice periods, perhaps by attending a mindfulness retreat. ECM offers retreats in the online environment. Visit our website and select “Retreats” for information about our upcoming retreats:

<https://www.eastcoastmindfulness.com>

One-to-One Mindfulness Coaching

Rebecca Eldridge of ECM offers online 30-minute private sessions for restoring, deepening, or simply learning more about your personal mindfulness practice. Go to Programs > Online One-to-One Mindfulness Coaching here—

<https://eastcoastmindfulness.com/>

For Further Exploration

As you continue your journey in mindfulness, you may wish to explore resources that could support you. Here are a few to consider—

Jon Kabat-Zinn’s Website

<https://jonkabat-zinn.com/>

The Open Heart Project with Susan Piver

<https://openheartproject.com/open-heart-project/>

Insight Timer

<https://insighttimer.com>

Mindful

<https://www.mindful.org>

Here is a list of books that might expand your understanding and application of what has been introduced through the MBSR course. Keep in mind that reading is a wonderful way to deepen your exposure to the themes and concepts of mindfulness; however, it can’t replace the primary role of practicing mindfulness.

Adyashanti	The Direct Way , Sounds True, 2021
Chödrön, Pema	Welcoming the Unwelcome , Shambhala, 2020
Chödrön, Pema	How to Meditate: A Practical Guide to Making Friends with Your Mind , Shambhala, 2013
Epstein, Ronald	Attending: Medicine, Mindfulness, & Humanity , Scribner, 2017
Farhi, Donna	Bringing Yoga to Life , HarperSanFrancisco, 2003
Goleman & Davidson	Altered Traits , Avery, 2017
Hanh, Thich Nhat	The Miracle of Mindfulness , Beacon Press, 1987
Hanh, Thich Nhat	Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet , Harper Collins, 2021
Hanson, Rick	Making Great Relationships , Harmony, 2023
Harris, Dan	Ten Percent Happier , Dey Street Books, 2014
Iyer, Pico	The Art of Stillness , Simon & Schuster, 2014
Joko Beck, Charlotte	Nothing Special: Living Zen , Harper, 1993
Kabat-Zinn, Jon	Full Catastrophe Living , Bantam, 2013
Kabat-Zinn, Jon	Mindfulness Meditation for Pain Relief , Sounds True, 2023
Kabat-Zinn, Jon	Coming to Our Senses Series: 4 books , Hatchett Books, 2018
Kornfield, Jack	After the Ecstasy, the Laundry , Sounds True, 2015
Neff, Kristin	Self-Compassion , William Morrow Paperbacks, 2015
Nepo, Mark	The Book of Awakening , Conari Press, 2011
Oliver, Mary	Devotions: The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver , Penguin Press, 2017
Roberts, Thomas	The Mindfulness Workbook , New Harbinger Pub, 2009
Ryan, Tim	A Mindful Nation , Hay House Inc, 2012
Salzberg, Sharon	Real Life: The Journey from Isolation to Openness and Freedom , Flatiron Books, 2023
Santorelli, Saki	Heal Thy Self , Bell Tower, New York, NY, 1999
Sapolsky, Robert	Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers , Holt Paperbacks, 2004
Siegel, Daniel	Aware , TarcherPerigee, 2020
Sokolov, Matthew	Practicing Mindfulness: 75 Essential Meditations , Althea Press, 2018
Warner, Brad	Sit Down and Shut Up , New World Library, 2007

Sharing the Practice

Some MBSR graduates notice the desire to further explore and share the teaching of MBSR. If you are interested in learning about teaching MBSR, please visit our website—

<https://www.eastcoastmindfulness.com/Programs/Train-to-Teach-MBSR/>

Enjoy Yourself!

May you remember to not take yourself too seriously as you practice mindfulness, and may you enjoy this ever-unfolding adventure called life!