**5 Ways to Wellbeing**

Time and time again, scientific studies have shown us that if we do the following five things listed below, happiness will increase.

1. Connect
2. Be Active
3. Keep learning
4. Help others
5. Taking notice

We can all make active and deliberate choices about changing the state in which we find ourselves. We just need to begin. Below are some top tactics for implementing these five things in your life, right now.

**1. Connect**

Each person you meet is a doorway into another world. Building solid and varied social connections in your life can increase your feelings of happiness and self-worth.

**Got 1 minute?**

* Every mate you have started out as ‘someone you didn’t know’. Strike up some chat with someone you’ve often wondered about saying ‘hello!’ to. They might be a total legend.
* Message a friend. It doesn’t matter what it says, people appreciate it when you think of them.

**Got an hour?**

* Kick back with a friend or family member who needs support or company.
* Invite someone (a person you usually wouldn’t think to invite) to do something with you and your mates. It’s interesting watching new friends interact with old friends!

**Got longer?**

* Got a group of mates you haven’t seen for a while? Organise a day up-town with them.
* Take the time to get to know your family. Ask them about their past. They are the best link to your past and usually most likely to stick with you in the future.
* Want to expand your social network? Meet people who share your interests! Having that one thing in common usually means they will be on your vibe.
* [Meetup](http://www.meetup.com/) is and online platform helps groups of people with shared interests plan events and facilitates offline group meetings in various localities around the world.

**2. Be Active**

Let’s not get it twisted – what you do with your body can have a powerful effect on your mental wellbeing. Gym not your vibe? There are loads of ways to stay active whilst enjoying life.

**Got 1 minute?**

[Plank](https://www.google.co.uk/#q=plank)for one minute! Doing this for a minute today will reap huge benefits. To see what we mean by a plank, type it into [Google](https://www.google.co.uk/#q=plank).

**Got an hour?**

* Need to go somewhere? You can take public transport and arrive feeling stressed and flustered, or you can rock up on a bicycle and arrive feeling fresh and revitalized. Bicycles save us money and keep us fit at the same time.
* Attend a dance workshop and learn how to dance like a boss.

**Got longer?**

* Take advantage of online discounts by visiting websites such as [Groupon](http://www.groupon.co.uk/), [Eversave](http://www.eversave.com/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) and [LivingSocial](https://www.livingsocial.com/gb)which offer great deals on fitness activities such as yoga, rock climbing and even sailing lessons.
* Everyone has a bit of Bruce Lee in them. Try martial arts! Martial Art classes are fun, they are one of the best forms of physical and mental exercise for people of any age or fitness level. [Martial Arts Near You](https://www.martialartsnearyou.co.uk/) allows you to access thousands of Martial Art classes run by qualified Martial Art teachers in Martial Art clubs, Martial Art schools, gyms and local venues around the UK. Finding a local Martial Art class near you has never been easier.

**3. Keep Learning**

A comfort zone is a cool place but nothing ever grows there. Step out of the comfort zone. You will learn things you never knew that you never knew.

**Got 1 minute?**

Ask yourself “if money were no issue, what would I want to spend my life doing?” Figuring that out is a good place to start.

Go online and check out [TED](https://www.ted.com/)for thousands of short, powerful talks delivered by world’s leading thinkers and doers.  Watch one talk on a topic that interests you.

**Got an hour?**

The best way to stay engaged is to surround yourself with people who share your interest. Joining a club or group will bring your interest to life.

**Got longer?**

If you want something you have never had, you have to do something you haven’t done before.

* [Princes’ Trust](http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/need_help/regions_and_countries/london_and_the_south_east.aspx) offers training courses and programmes that are free to join. You’ll get one to one support from staff members and mentors, you’ll meet other young people just like you, and they’ll help you with the skills and qualifications that you need to achieve your goals.
* [Futureversity](http://www.futureversity.org/content/348/About-Us)believes all young people have the potential to be extraordinary. They provide free courses and activities for 11-25 year olds to help them develop the skills and self-belief they need to make the most of their lives.

Learning new skills can give you a sense of achievement and a new confidence. Sure, you might feel awkward in the new environment at first, but great things never came from comfort zones.

**4. Help Others**

Whether it’s giving a mate a hand, throwing your weight in behind a cause that matters or just supporting other people in some way. Giving is like gold-dust for our mental wellbeing.

**Got 1 minute?**

1. Be really friendly to a shopkeeper and ask them what they are up to on the weekend.
2. Stop to help someone struggling with their bags up some stairs.
3. Hold the door open for someone.
4. Do a chore for your family.
5. Show appreciation for someone publicly.

**Got an hour?**

* Is your friend struggling with something? Lend your ear and then help them take action.
* Go to a charity shop and donate something you don’t use. Others can put your clutter to good use.

**Got longer?**

* Lend your voice to a cause that matters to you.
* Volunteering in your local community can remind you of your sense of purpose and make you feel happier and more satisfied about life.
* [NCS](http://www.ncsthechallenge.org/)is a summer programme that offers 15 to 17 year olds the opportunity to try new things. It brings young people together from all different backgrounds in a common purpose and by offering new experiences. It gives them the chance to take on new challenges, learn new skills and meet new people. This helps discover their own talents and realise their potential whilst having fun.
* [Vinspired](https://vinspired.com/)is the nation’s leading youth volunteering charity. It believes that young people can change the world and provides young people with opportunities to gain new experiences and skills for life by taking action on causes they care about. They have created more than one million volunteering opportunities. So far, over 164,000 young people have used [vinspired.com](https://vinspired.com/) to volunteer with more than 4,400 charities.

**5. Take Notice**

Happiness is often right in front of your eyes – more than enough to be happy right now. You don’t have to run into the future in order to get more.

**Got 1 minute?**

* Take notice of how you are feeling at this very moment, watch your thoughts and feel the sensations in the body.
* Try looking at something right you see all the time (whatever in front of you right now!) Look at the detail. See anything you haven’t notice before?

**Got an hour?**

* Slow down. Savor the moment, whether you are bouncing around town, munching breakfast or chilling with friends. Remember, the past doesn’t exist anymore and the future hasn’t happened yet. There is only now.
* Pay attention to how your mates might be feeling, it will help you realise when you need to be there for them. The more you help them, the more likely they are to realise when you neeed support too.

**Got Longer**

Training your brain using [mindfulness](http://localhost/mindkit/toolbox/mindful-living/) will help you to stay more focused on what is going on around you. Remember, you don’t notice how much you don’t notice until you start noticing the things you have not been noticing!

To understand how to feel your best, we first need to unpick two distinctive states – pleasure and happiness.

Most of us think that the key to happiness is maximizing our personal pleasure and minimising pain. But **there is a difference between pleasure and happiness**. Pleasure does not necessarily lead to happiness.

**Pleasure is always temporary.** It is can be experienced through consuming things such as eating food or buying clothes or the latest gadgets. The problem is, when our consumption of it is over, the pleasure immediately disappears. When the sensation dies, the impulse comes into the brain, “Give me more pleasure!” but when we can’t get more, we are left where we started.

**Happiness is a deeper and more rewarding state.**

The difference between happiness and pleasure is that we can act directly in order to achieve instant pleasure but **happiness can only be experienced as a by-product of living skillfully.**

If we want to be happy, **we have to live life well, and we need to act right.**

Think about mindfulness in terms of an ABC approach to life…

**A. Develop Awareness**

Staying focused on the present moment, turning down the volume knob on your brain by tuning in to your surrounding environment and becoming more aware of your bodily sensations.

**B. Be with Experiences**

See thoughts and feelings simply ‘as they are’ rather than avoiding, pushing them away or distracting yourself from them. Realise that thoughts are simply mental events that come and go – you can choose whether to act on them or not – do not to take them too seriously or identify too strongly with them.

**C. Make Skillful Choices**

Respond to events skillfully independent of what mood you are in, rather than having knee-jerk reactions.

**The Spotlight Metaphor**

Our attention is something that allows us to focus on one piece of information while ignoring the rest. A common metaphor for attention is a spotlight that (in mindfulness) brings the present moment into focus. Attention is closely linked to awareness and memory and Mindfulness is a form of attention training – learning how to keep up a non-judgmental awareness of present moment experiences. This is achieved through body focused Mindfulness techniques such as the body scan, breathing exercises, Mindful sitting and Mindful movement.

**How will Mindfulness Improve my Life?**

Mindfulness is scientifically proven to help us be on form by:

* Improving our focus and attention.
* Become more positively aware of ourselves and our body.
* Reduces stress
* Improve your performance at work or in class
* Helps beat addictions
* Becoming more emotionally grounded.

**What’s the Proof? Show me the Science**

People have been practicing mindfulness for thousands of years – and there’s a good reason for that! It’s only recently that scientists decided to check out what all the fuss was about. What they found astonished them.

Neuroscientists across the world have discovered that if you practice mindfulness then your brain physically changes shape! And this process affects peoples’ lives in the following ways.

**1. Less Stress**

Mindfulness turns down the stressful ‘fight or flight’ hormones and instead activates the part of our nervous system that is responsible for resting and digesting, which helps you relax and cope with stress.

*(Benson, H., Beary, J., & Carol, M. (1974). The relaxation response. Psychiatry. 19, 37. 37-45.6)*

**2. More Creativity**

Researchers discovered that ‘divergent thinking’ (the type of thinking that helps you generate new ideas) is promoted and increased in people that train in Mindfulness.

*(Colzato, L., Ozturk, A. & Hommel, B. (2012). Meditate to create: the impact of focused-attention and open-monitoring training on convergent and divergent thinking. Front. Psychology. 3, 116)*

**3. Increased Focus**

It takes just 11 hours of Mindfulness to change the structure of the part of our brain responsible for monitoring our focus and control. Neuroscientists found people who practice mindfulness can focus on tasks for longer without getting distracted.

*(Levy, D., Wobbrock, J., Kaszniak, A. & Ostergren, M. (2012). The Effects of Mindfulness Meditation Training on Multitasking in a High-Stress Information Environment. Proceedings of Graphics Interface. 45-52.)*

**4. Less Anxiety and Depression**

Scientists studied people experiencing high levels of anxiety or depression in their lives. They found that that mindfulness techniques were extremely effective at reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression.

*(Stefan G. Hofmann, Alice T. Sawyer, Ashley A. Witt, & Diana Oh. 2010. The Effect of Mindfulness-Based Therapy on Anxiety and Depression: A Meta-Analytic Review)*

**The best thing about Mindfulness is that it helps us even when we’re not actively practicing it.**

It takes just ten minutes of mindfulness practice a day to start reaping the rewards. You’ve already started by checking out this website.

Now let’s get started – there’s no time like the present.  Below, are a few gateways into mindfulness, even if you haven’t got the time to train your mind for ten minutes a day, there’s something here for you!

Challenge yourself to live more mindfully. Watch what happens…

Got 1 minute?

**CHECK WHERE YOU’RE AT.**

This may seem strange but ask yourself “where am I?” Take a look around. Notice everything without labelling or judging it as good or bad. Focus on the sounds, smells, people and objects around you. Take it all in.

Got 5 minutes?

**ACTIVITY 1: TUNE IN**

Close your eyes (not while you’re walking around!) and concentrate on how you’re breathing feels. Feel the air on the back of your throat as it goes in and comes out. Feel your shoulders raising and falling. Notice the short space between the in breath and the out breath. You’ll be surprised at the difference this can make to your day.

**ACTIVITY 2: GROUND YOURSELF**

Become aware of your body. Notice the feeling of your feet on the floor. The contact between the body and the chair you are sitting on. Pay attention to any sensations going on within the body. Or you could feel the body in its entirety. If you’re not sure what we mean by this… close your eyes and put your hand up in the air. You can’t see your hand yet you still know it’s there, right? It’s the same concept but instead of just your hand you are paying attention to your whole body.

Everyday Activities to Practice Mindfully

**BRUSHING YOUR TEETH**

Notice the feeling of the bristles on your teeth and gums, the feeling of the toothbrush in your hand, the weight of your arm as you brush or the sound of the toothbrush brushing your teeth.

**SHOWERING**

Feel the water running down your back, the sensation of the heat on your body. Notice your body and muscles relaxing in the heat. Notice the sound of the running water.

**WALKING TO CLASS**

Feel the weight of your bag on your shoulder. Become aware of the feeling of your feet hitting the ground as you walk. Pay attention to the sights, smells and sounds all around you. Just enjoy the walk!

**GETTING DRESSED IN THE MORNING**

Pay attention to the feeling of your clothes going over your skin. Notice the texture and feel of each item as you put in on. What colour are your clothes? Feel the weight of them resting on your body.

**CAN YOU THINK OF SOME MORE?**

Choose one thing that you do every day and try to do it mindfully each time you do it. The best thing about mindfulness is that you can apply it to almost every activity of your day so even if you don’t have time to formally train the mind you will still be able to practice.

Feel free to put your own twist on any of these ideas. You’re just remixing to suit yourself.

Got longer? I love my Apps

**HEADSPACE**

Check out our friends at [Headspace – The Gym membership for the Mind](https://www.headspace.com/). These guys will take you through the journey of mindfulness in a step by step, easy to follow format. With simple animations and easy to understand ideas, it’s probably one of the best apps for mindfulness practice you can get. The great thing about apps is you can practice wherever you are. It’s like having your very own personal trainer for the mind.

**MINDFULNESS: THE ART OF BEING**

Another app you can try is – [Mindfulness: The Art of Being by Reuben Lowe](http://www.mindfulcreation.com/apps/). This app is in an easy to understand format and is a great introduction to mindfulness. Plus, it’s free!

Got longer? I am bookworm

Read about mindfulness with these two books:

1. [Mindfulness: A practical guide to finding peace in a frantic world](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Mindfulness-practical-guide-finding-frantic-ebook/dp/B004TTHD9O/ref%3Dsr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1437048899&sr=1-1&keywords=mindfulness) by Prof. Mark Williams. Best for beginners with weekly practices and audio exercises.
2. [Get Some Headspace](http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/1444722204/mndfltps-21) by Andy Puddicombe. This book has lots of 10 minute exercises and will help you to quiet the mind, feel less stressed, less tired and achieve a new level of calm.

Got longer? I'm a people person

If you have more time and are serious about training your mind then join a mindfulness group. There are lots of free groups that you can go to where you will learn more formal practices and meet new people who are also interested in mindfulness.

[Wake up London](http://wakeuplondon.org/afternoons-of-mindfulness/) are an organisation of young people who run weekly mindfulness classes. Pay them a visit. They won’t bite – they are far too mindful for that!

Got longer? I'm a computer lover

If you’d rather practice mindfulness by yourself, download some guided mindfulness practices. These can vary from 3 minutes to an hour and are a really great way to get started.

You can find guided mindfulness exercises on [YouTube](http://youtube.com/), [Spotify](http://spotify.com/)and[iTunes](https://www.apple.com/uk/itunes/). Set aside a time every day when you won’t be disturbed, and follow the instructions. It may seem daunting at first but the more you practice the easier it gets. You’ll notice a huge change in your life. You’ll be less stressed, calm, focused and confident.

Here are some links to get you started:

**AUDIO DOWNLOADS**

* [Breathing space by Mark Williams](http://cdn.franticworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Three-Minute-Breathing-Space-meditation-from-book-Mindfulness-Finding-Peace-in-a-Frantic-World-128k.mp3) (3 mins)
* [Sounds and thoughts by Mark Williams](http://cdn.franticworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Sounds-and-thoughts-meditation-from-book-Mindfulness-Finding-Peace-in-a-Frantic-World-128k.mp3) (8mins)

**YOUTUBE VIDEO**

[Get](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVzTnS_IONU)S[ome Headspace by Andy Puddicombe](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVzTnS_IONU) (10 mins)