

# ASSESS YOUR STRESS

## Mindfulness: Release the Stress

Most of us have adapted to living with high levels of stress. Stress can be so common we may have trouble recognizing its impact. Think honestly about the stress in your life. Use the cues listed to help you assess your stress level.

### How often do you notice one or more signs of stress?

A sign might be irritability, tension, exhaustion, anxiety or sadness. It could be physical, such as headaches or indigestion. Or it might be feeling burned out, overwhelmed or defeated when thinking about responsibilities. It may be a combination.

<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
Constantly		Frequently		About half the time			Infrequently			Never

### Could mindfulness make a difference?

How mindful are you now? Check items that apply to you.

- I am a multitasker.
- I often think about something else when someone is talking to me.
- I tend to forget people's names right after hearing them.
- I get stuck in thoughts about the past.
- I have a hard time accepting change.
- I spend a lot of time thinking/worrying about what might happen in the future.
- I feel like my emotions rule me, rather than the other way around.
- I have trouble dealing with emotional distress.
- I am my own worst critic.
- I always have to be doing something.
- I am often distracted and have trouble concentrating.
- I often read, watch TV or do some other activity while eating.

Mindfulness is a way of experiencing the world that can be valuable to anyone. Learning to be mindful may be especially helpful to you if you checked several of the boxes and feel stressed about half the time or more.

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# BREATHE

## Mindfulness: Release the Stress

Breathing slowly and rhythmically makes your body feel like it does when you are relaxed. This sends a message to your brain to calm down. Focusing on your breathing can also reduce your sense of stress by clearing your mind of negative thoughts.

### Belly breathing

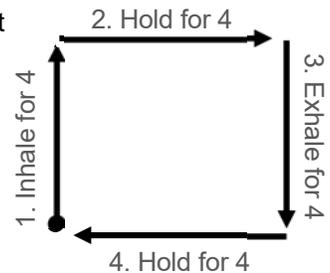
- › Find a relaxed, comfortable position. Keep your back straight, but not tight. Put a hand on your belly just below your ribs and the other on your chest.
- › Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose, and let your belly push your hand out as the muscles relax. Your chest should not move.
- › Hold that breath for a moment, then breathe out through pursed lips as if you were whistling. Straighten your back. Let belly muscles tighten. Feel the hand on your belly go in.
- › Take your time with each breath. Try to increase each in and out breath. Notice where you feel your breath in your body – chest, abdomen, nostrils.
- › Your mind may wander. That's OK. Just notice the wandering and gently redirect your attention back to your breathing.
- › Do this 5 to 10 times.

### Breathing meditation

- › Relax. Allow the body and mind to settle. Do what helps you become comfortable. Create a stable base for yourself. Gently allow eyes to close.
- › Take a few complete, deep breaths, in and out. Then trust the breath to continue on its own.
- › Notice where your breath is most obvious in the body. It may be the movement of your belly or chest or a sensation beneath your nostrils.
- › As you breathe in, focus on connecting with things as they are. As you breathe out, focus on accepting and/or releasing.

### Square breathing

- › Find a comfortable position. Take several slow natural breaths. Close your eyes and picture a square. Choose one corner to be your starting point.
- › Count slowly to four as you inhale through your nose. Picturing your breath moving up one side of the square. You can also trace an outline of a square with your finger.
- › Then count slowly to four as you hold your breath and visualize moving across the next side.
- › Then move down next side; count slowly to four while exhaling.
- › Then hold without breathing in or out for a count of four on the last side.
- › Repeat 2 to 4 times.



- › It's OK if your mind wanders. When you become aware, that's a moment of mindfulness! Note what has happened and gently guide your thoughts back to your breath. It's always OK to begin again.
- › Continue to focus on your in and out breaths for several minutes.
- › Then wiggle your fingers and toes and gently open your eyes. Take your time to adjust. Note your experience. Notice any difference between when you began and now.

# LEARN MORE

## Mindfulness: Release the Stress

The following links and resources can help you explore further:

**UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center**

[www.marc.ucla.edu](http://www.marc.ucla.edu)

**Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley**

[www.greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/mindfulness](http://www.greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/mindfulness)

**University of Massachusetts: Center for Mindfulness**

[www.umassmed.edu/cfm](http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm)

**Mindful – Taking Time for What Matters**

[www.mindful.org](http://www.mindful.org)

**Psychology Today – Mindfulness**

[www.psychologytoday.com/basics/mindfulness](http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/mindfulness)

**MindfulNet**

[www.mindfulnet.org](http://www.mindfulnet.org)

### Books

- › Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life by Jon Kabat-Zinn
- › Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness by Jon Kabat-Zinn
- › The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation by Thích Nhất Hạnh
- › Mindfulness in Plain English by Bhante Henepola Gunaratana

### Try out guided meditations

Experience different types of short meditations guided by professional facilitators.

[www.uclahealth.org/marc/mindful-meditations](http://www.uclahealth.org/marc/mindful-meditations)

### Explore a class

Search online for Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) or Mindful Meditation to find courses in your area.

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