

## Mindfulness of the Senses

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**Duration:** 5-15 minutes

**Frequency:** Daily or as needed

**Level of Difficulty:** Moderate

**Overview:** The practice of mindfulness helps us to become more immersed in the present moment. Over time, the cultivation of mindfulness has been shown to have a multitude of benefits, including improved physical health, lower levels of depression and anxiety, lower stress, and greater levels of psychological well-being. One of the best ways to become more present is to increase our moment-to-moment awareness of our sensory experiences. In this exercise you'll begin practicing how to use your various senses (sight, touch, taste, smell, and hearing) to become more fully immersed in the present moment.

**Instructions:**

1. Begin by finding a comfortable, peaceful place to sit. Set aside around 10 minutes to start with when beginning this practice, though you can of course extend this time further in the days to come. Keeping your back straight, allow your shoulders to relax. Close your eyes if you're comfortable doing so; otherwise, choose a spot on the floor in front of you to softly focus your gaze.
2. Begin by taking three gentle and easy breaths, in and out of your nose, followed by slow and steady exhales. With each passing breath, feel yourself slowing down ever so slightly, and become more immersed in the moment.
3. If you notice your mind wandering or your thoughts drifting, simply notice this and return your awareness and attention to your breath. This may occur at many points throughout this meditation; it's simply what our mind does. Merely observe the tendency of your mind to wander, and without judgment, return your awareness to your breath.
4. Bring full attention now to your breathing. Notice the sensation of your breath as it enters and leaves your body. With each passing breath, observe yourself becoming more present in this moment.
5. When you're ready, bring your attention now to the sounds around you. Notice the sound of your breath as you slowly inhale in then exhale out. Notice even the faintest of sounds that you can

detect around you, and notice the silence as well. Imagine your ears as satellites, able to pick up on any and all sounds that surround you in this moment. Simply notice these sounds, without judgment, and without any desire for things to be different than they are.

6. Bring awareness now to any smells that you can detect. As you inhale, observe any scents, whether they are strong or faint, that your nose picks up. Observe any judgments that arise, and simply notice those as well. Take a few moments to fully observe any scents and smells that you can detect.
7. Shift your focus now to feeling your body, sitting in your chair or on the floor. Notice the weight of your body being supported beneath you. Become aware of the texture of the fabric of your clothing against your skin, the temperature of the air against your skin. Notice your hands, and feel them resting wherever they are placed. Take a few moments to fully notice all of this.
8. Now bring your awareness to any tastes that you can detect in your mouth. Whether faint or strong, simply observe any and all tastes that you're able to detect. If you're unable to, simply notice that as well.
9. With your eyes closed, imagine what the room looks like around you. Paint a picture in your mind's eye of what surrounds you right here in this moment. Try picturing the walls, the floor beneath you, and the colors of the room. Take a few moments to visualize your surroundings.
10. Now notice what's happening in your mind. Are your thoughts looking up ahead towards the future, backwards to the past, or are they here and now in the present moment? Without judgment, simply notice where your mind is taking you. If you catch your mind wandering or your thoughts drifting, don't judge yourself or react self-critically to this. Simply observe this, and gently redirect your attention and awareness back to your various senses.
11. After about 10 minutes have gone by, gently open your eyes, and bring your awareness back to your surroundings. Allow yourself to bask in the comfort and tranquility of the present moment for a few more moments.

### **Key Points to Consider:**

- ✓ Feel free to experiment with this exercise, to do it standing or seated, and at different times throughout the day.
- ✓ For those relatively new to mindfulness, this (and other mindfulness exercises) can feel quite challenging, and that's okay. Remember, cultivating greater present-moment awareness is a process, and can take time.
- ✓ Once you've developed this practice a bit, it can be a great stress-reducer during times of stress or anxiety.

**How and why it works:** Numerous studies have shown the link between mindfulness and better overall health, reduced depression and anxiety, and greater ability to manage stress. One of the great benefits of mindfulness is that it enables us to gain greater distance from our negative thoughts and feelings, so that we don't feel overwhelmed by these difficult moments. By fully experiencing what's



