

Mindfulness Matters

5 Senses in 5 Mindful Minutes

The basic premise of this exercise is that reconnecting with all your senses can ground you in the present moment, putting a stop to racing thoughts.

It is a short, simple mindfulness technique that slows your respiration rate reduces your pulse. It helps to let your body know that there is nothing to fear. Anyone can make time for this exercise, as it only lasts five minutes.

How to do it

This technique will take you through your five senses to help remind you of the present. This is a calming technique that can help you get through tough or stressful situations. All you need is a quiet space where you can be alone for those five minutes.

Sit upright, rest your hands-on top of your thighs, and make sure you're comfortable. Next, breathe slowly and deeply, and follow these five steps.

LOOK

What can you see? What colours are present, and what shapes? Are there dominant shades in the room, and are the colours warm or cold? And are certain colours missing? All these facts ground you in the room, and in your body, reducing the physical and mental symptoms of anxiety.

If you have any difficulties with this stage, you can also set up specific objects to focus on.

Some people choose a row of stones, while others choose 5-10 items with varying textures. Approaching the exercise in this way can get you used to the idea of visual focus, and you'll soon be able to do it in any room.

FEEL

Turn your attention to touch and the feelings of textures. When you first started the exercise, you placed your hands on your thighs. Are they still there? What can you feel under your hands? You might feel the roughness of your jeans, the warmth of your bare skin, or the softness of a cotton skirt.

However, don't just focus on your hands. Think about what is under your feet, and where your body is sitting. Notice all of the textures, and scan for places where your body feels tense and where it feels relaxed.

LISTEN

As you continue to breathe slowly and deeply, start to tune in to what you can hear around you. Don't judge the sounds around you (classifying them as positive or negative), just notice them.

The first things you'll notice are things like traffic, conversation in your building, music and so on.

However, as you spend a minute doing this, you should slowly start to hear more sounds than you did at the beginning. What started as an awareness of the loudest and most intrusive noises will widen out so that you can hear little noises in your home or office.

If you have difficulty focusing on sounds and your mind starts to wander, bring your attention back to your breathing. When you have that under control, move back to the hearing stage of the exercise.

SMELL

After listening, switch your attention over to your sense of smell.

- What different scents can you pick up in your environment?
- If you're at home, can you smell food that is cooking or that was recently eaten?
- Can you smell any products you've used, such as your shampoo or fabric softener?
- And if you're somewhere in your workplace, can you pick up the distinctive odor produced by electronic equipment?
- Try picking up smells coming from outside, too, whether you notice freshly cut grass or exhaust fumes.

The goal is not to classify smells into categories of "good" and "bad."

If you don't have a particularly strong sense of smell, you can make this step of the exercise easier by lightening a scented candle before your five-minute period. This will give you something distinct to focus on, and it's this mindful appreciation of the present that you are trying to create.

TASTE

The taste step of your anxiety-busting mindfulness exercise might sound odd if you don't have anything to eat or drink. You will likely find the technique easier if you do have something to sip or nibble during this stage, but it isn't necessary. You can also just focus on the sensations in your mouth; how your tongue feels resting between your teeth, what tastes (if any) remain from a previous meal and the texture of your saliva in your mouth. You can even try running your tongue over each tooth in turn and move it along the inside of your cheeks.

If you do have food, apply the same ideas discussed in the previous steps above. In other words, really notice all the different textures in what you're eating. Are some parts smooth, while others are rough? What distinctive ingredients can you detect? And does the taste linger after you swallow?

To round off the anxiety grounding exercise, stand up from where you're sitting and touch one or two objects in the room. This is an important part of the grounding process and helps you to continuously train your attention on the present. And if you get distracted during your exercise, just start again. In the end, you should feel calmer and more resilient.

Once you've done this technique a few times, it becomes much easier to do at a faster rate.

