

6 Mindfulness Tips to Combat Holiday Stress



EFR EMPLOYEE & FAMILY RESOURCES



Is the holiday season stressful or even lonely? Have you heard about mindfulness's scientific benefits but don't see how you could fit it in during the holidays?

We often mistakenly think meditation requires sitting in a lotus posture, preferably on a still lake in Thailand with birds chirping in the background. Though that would be nice, it's clearly not always possible, and the good news is that it's not necessary, either!

Many meditation exercises aim to bring your mind to the present moment because research concludes, "a wandering mind is an unhappy mind." Regardless of our activities, we are happiest when our minds are in the present moment. Yet our minds tend to wander- about 50% of the time, we aren't in the present moment.

No matter what we are doing — whether it is commuting or traveling, eating or talking, sitting around, or doing chores, each of these activities presents an opportunity for mindfulness. Here are six easy ways to integrate mindfulness into your holidays (and any day)!



1 During your commute

Drive mindfully. So often, we regard our commute as a stressful annoyance. The worst is when we are stuck in traffic. But hold on! Here's a chance to sit back, relax, and focus on your breathing.

Bring your mind back into the present moment, and see if you can become aware of everything around you. Usually, our mind is constantly wandering, especially when we're in an uncomfortable situation. Being stuck in a commute or traffic allows us to develop the skill of being in the present moment.

Have screaming children in the backseat? Practice fully accepting the moment as it is. Chances are they will calm down as you do. The result? You'll arrive calmer and feel more rested and restored.

2 During meals

Eat mindfully. We often automatically cram down food while watching TV, between meetings, or in front of our computers. During the holidays, we tend to overeat. We are so busy consuming that we fail to fully appreciate the array of flavors saturating our mouths!

Try eating a snack with full attention. Notice how it looks and smells. Feel the burst of flavors as you place it in your mouth, noticing the taste of each bite, the texture. Contemplate the many people it took to bring this food to you (from the farmers to people delivering it to stores to you). You will open your eyes renewed, calmer, and more focused.

Bring a heightened awareness to your eating experience without judging it.





“Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.”

3 During conversation

Listen mindfully. Every interaction, whether at work or home, is an opportunity for mindfulness. Usually, we are bursting with the impulse to talk about ourselves, to interrupt, or, often, our minds are wandering—i.e., we are not really listening.

If, even for 5 minutes, you can fully dedicate your attention and awareness to the people speaking to you, you will feel more peaceful and calm and notice that you can understand them better. In turn, they will feel deeply grateful and valued as they recognize your full attention is on them.

4 During couch potato time

Rest mindfully. Ever get home and crash on the sofa, too tired to move? Will this holiday involve a lot of sitting around with family?

Hey, it's a great time to close your eyes and recharge the batteries. Just like you plug in your phone for a recharge, you can get a quick pick me up by unplugging yourself. Just 5 minutes of sitting with your eyes closed and noticing the in and outflow of your breath can do wonders.



5 During chores

Yes, that's right: Chore mindfully. Hate doing the dishes, laundry, or changing diapers, especially when cleaning up after a holiday party? Research shows we enjoy something more if we are 100 percent present with it.

Next time you do an annoying chore, see if you can do so with 100 percent of your attention instead of trying to get it over with or daydreaming about something you'd rather do.



6 Anytime

Practice gratitude. Research suggests we actually have three times more positive experiences than negative ones each day. What keeps us from fully capitalizing on all the good in our lives? We tend to focus on the negative. The antidote? Practicing gratitude! Moreover, gratitude is linked to a host of psychological and health benefits!

If we are truly mindful, we will naturally feel grateful because of an expanded awareness of all of the gifts we have in our lives. Whether at work or home, take 5 minutes to close your eyes and think of all the things you feel grateful for. Research shows it will not only improve your health and well-being, but chances are, it will also make you more resilient and happy.