

# PR2 – Mindfulness Toolbox for Health and Well-being



Mindfulness Practices for Students in Society



Vilnius  
University



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# PR2 – Mindfulness Toolbox

## Mindfulness and Elements of Self-care to Promote Mental Health

This deliverable is the second project result (PR2) of MP4s, funded by the European Union's Erasmus+ Programme under the project ID 2021-1-FR01-KA220-HED-000027504.

It is a collection of resources and practices that you can use to approach mindfulness in an experiential way. Just as reading about football is not enough to become a football player, simply reading about mindfulness may not suffice to witness a life-changing experience.

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## Disclaimer

This Toolbox, provided by the MP4s project, offers information, self-care proposals, and mindfulness practices to guide young people and organizations in facilitating conscious changes, overcoming challenges through experiential learning, and promoting well-being. However, it does not replace professional help or attendance in a mindfulness-based program, whether experienced individually or in a group, and facilitated by a certified mindfulness teacher.

It is always an individual's responsibility to seek appropriate assessment, advice, support, and treatment from a qualified healthcare professional if they have concerns about their health.

MP4s is not responsible for any adverse experiences or consequences that may arise for an individual during or after using the provided resources. If you are experiencing mental health problems, please seek professional help from a psychologist or other local mental health professional.



## I. Mindfulness: A Path to Well-being

Mindfulness is the human ability to be fully present by purposefully paying attention to the present moment, aware of where we are and what we are doing, and not being overly reactive or overwhelmed by what is going on around us or in our mind.

This practice involves fully being in the moment, acknowledging your thoughts, feelings, and surroundings without judgment, and offers numerous benefits for enhancing both your physical and mental well-being.

Only by realizing what we are feeling, when we are feeling it, can we choose what to do to take care of ourselves.

### A) Benefits of Practicing Mindfulness for Health and Well-being

Engaging in mindfulness practices can lead to a wide range of positive outcomes.

These benefits include:

- 1) Improved physical and psychosocial well-being
- 2) Reduction of mental health problems such as stress, anxiety, depression, and burnout
- 3) Increased self-care practices
- 4) Enhanced ability to focus attention
- 5) Improved adaptability and resilience
- 6) Strengthening social and emotional skills
- 7) Promoting prosocial behavior
- 8) Elevating school performance

These advantages highlight the profound impact mindfulness can have on various aspects of one's life, encompassing both mental and physical aspects, as well as personal and interpersonal growth.

### B) How to start meditating?

In mindfulness practice, we start by learning to pay attention to the breath as it naturally comes and goes.

We also become aware of when the mind inevitably drifts away from this task (which can happen quite easily). The practice of redirecting our focus back to the breath, all while maintaining a gentle and non-judgmental attitude, helps cultivate our attention and mindfulness.

While the concept may seem simple, the practice itself demands patience.





## C) Suggestions to put into practice

Here are some practical suggestions to help you integrate mindfulness into your everyday routine:

**Step 1 – Find a place** that feels calm and peaceful, where you won't be interrupted.

**Step 2 – Set a specific time duration:** If you're just starting out, it may be helpful to choose a short time, like 5 or 10 minutes.

**Step 3 – Choose a posture:** You can sit in a chair with your feet on the floor, sit with your legs crossed, or stand - everything is fine. Just make sure you are stable and in a position where you can stay for the time you set.

**Step 4 – Feel your breathing:** Follow, with curiosity, the sensation of your breathing as the air enters and leaves the body. Where in the body is breathing most noticeable at this moment?

**Step 5 – Note when your mind gets distracted:** Sooner or later, your attention will leave your breathing and wander to other places (thoughts, sounds, tasks to do...). When you notice that your mind has become distracted (which is perfectly natural), bring your attention back to your breathing. One and another time.

**Step 6 – Be kind to your wandering mind:** As best you can, don't get caught up in the content of the thoughts that may have arisen. Simply bring your attention back to your breathing. Counting to 10 breaths can be a good way to cultivate attention.

**Step 7 – End gently:** When you're ready, gently look up (if your eyes are closed, open them). Notice the sounds in the environment around you. Notice how your body feels right now. Notice your thoughts and emotions. Everything is fine as it is! That's right!

This is the practice. Focus your attention, your mind wanders, bring it back and try to do it as gently as possible (as many times as necessary). It may be easier at first to use guided practices. It will be interesting to practice with a colleague and, if you feel safe, share the experience. As with any other skill, practice and repetition are necessary.



*To watch a YouTube video introducing how to practice mindfulness.*

*This video is owned and provided by the [Smiling Mind YouTube channel](#) and has been illustrated by Beci Orpin from The Jacky Winter Group*



## D) 8 Essential Suggestions to Nourish Your Mindfulness Practice

### 1. Practice daily, even if for a short time

Whether it's 5, 15 or 45-minutes, what matters most is a regular daily practice rather than leaving it for when we're "in the mood". In fact, we do not wait for a life crisis to start practicing. We practice mindfulness to resource ourselves to face challenging times, but also to experience the richness of life in its fullness. We can choose a place that is quiet, protected, and conducive to presence, but we can also be present at any moment in our life, while eating, walking or during a normal daily routine. What we need, again and again, is simply a pause to slow down and notice our experience with an openhearted awareness.

### 2. Attitude is everything

The biggest reason people quit practicing mindfulness is because they judge themselves for how they are practicing. The invitation is to not turn it into another domain of self-criticism! Instead, choose to cultivate mindfulness because you care.

about living truly to your heart and you wish to be generous to yourself. At the start of each sitting, remind yourself of what draws you to sit and then set your intention to be kind to yourself however your practice unfolds.

Other qualities which can support your practice are curiosity, patience, acceptance, and wise effort.

### 3. Pay attention to your posture

When people think of mindfulness, they imagine a yogi wearing white clothes sitting cross-legged on the floor. In reality, you can practice in any position that feels comfortable to you (lying down, sitting or standing) as long as it promotes a sense of alertness, openness, and ease. For sitting, you might use a chair or a kneeling bench, or a cushion on the floor. The invitation is to sit upright, in a way that allows you to feel alert and alive. Allow your hands to rest comfortably on your knees or lap. Let your eyes close, or if you prefer, leave the eyes open with the gaze soft and receptive.

Periodically come back to check your posture, as a way of staying connected to your senses.

### 4. Arrive in your body

Scanning your body with your awareness will help you shift out of thinking and connect with vitality, openness, and presence to send a message of ease to your entire nervous system.

You can start from your head and move your attention slowly downward, or vice versa, while softening different parts of the body. As you slow down, you become aware, from the inside out, of the sensations and energy moving through the body.

### 5. Select an Anchor for presence

Our anchor is our "home-base" where we can return to when noticing we have been distracted or we got lost in thoughts. This will help to quiet the mind and be more receptive to the present moment.

Useful anchors are:



- **The body** – You might place your attention on the sensations in a particular part of the body – perhaps the soles of the feet, the hands, the belly or lips. It's helpful to choose an area that feels neutral and at ease.
- **The breath** – You might choose to pay attention to the sensations of the breath as it enters and leaves the nostrils, or the rise and fall of the chest and belly while breathing. For some, it is helpful to attend to the experience of the whole-body breathing.
- **Sounds** – Listening to the sounds around you as they arise and fall away.

You can also combine 2 anchors if that feels appropriate.

## 6. Keep coming back

While quieting the mind supports the practice, there is a misconception that the goal is to get rid of thoughts.

That is impossible, the mind secretes thoughts like the body secretes enzymes! Please don't be at war with your mind. Instead of being judgmental when you realize you've been distracted, bring interest and friendliness to the shift from thoughts to presence. We call this: befriending the mind.

When you recognize that you have been lost in thought, gently come back by shifting your attention to sounds, sensations and feelings that are happening in the present. Allow your anchor to be in the foreground, and become aware of your changing moment-to-moment experience.

## 7. Deepen mindful presence with two key questions:

- **What is happening inside me right now?**

This will help direct your attention to your inner experience. You might experiment with naming or noting strong waves of experience: fear, sorrow, tingling, tightness, sounds, worries as a way to awaken a clear presence.

- **Can I be with this?**

This will help you relate to what arises with gentle acceptance.

After naming what's happening (there is boredom or tiredness or agitation) you might explore whispering to yourself: "it's challenging, but I can gently be with it, and I deeply care about my inner life".

## 8. Remember Kindness

When you encounter challenging emotions such as fear, confusion, sadness or hurt, you can offer kindness to yourself rather than repressing your feelings. You might put a hand gently over your heart and send a message of care to the vulnerable place inside you.

Mindfulness and heartfulness are inseparable: the more you bring these qualities to your inner life, the more they will enrich your relationships and ripple out into the world.





## II. Self-care to promote mental health

### A) Nutrition

The relationship between nutrition and mental health is bidirectional: the foods we eat affect our mental health, and our mental health affects what and how well we eat.

A healthy, well-balanced diet can help us think clearly and feel more alert. It can also improve concentration and attention span. Conversely, an inadequate diet can lead to fatigue, impaired decision-making, and can slow down reaction time.

#### Benefits of a Healthy Nutrition on Mental Health

- It improves concentration and attention span
- It help to think clearly and feel more alert
- Better sleep to regulate the mood
- It increases feelings of self-worth

#### Suggestions You Could Put into Practice

- Savor small bites, and chew thoroughly
- Know and listen your body's personal hunger signals
- Rate your hunger
- Cut distractions such as phone or TV while eating
- Make eating an experience and pay full attention to your senses



To watch a YouTube video introducing how to Use Mindfulness in Eating. This video is owned and provided by the [Headspace YouTube channel](#).





## B) Physical activity

Exercise can improve your sense of control, coping ability and self-esteem. People who exercise regularly often report how good achieving a goal makes them feel.

### Benefits of Exercise on Mental Health

- Exercise can distract you from negative thoughts and provide opportunities to try new experiences.
- It offers an opportunity to socialize and get social support if you exercise with others.
- Exercise increases your energy levels.
- Physical activity can be an outlet for your frustrations.
- Exercise can reduce skeletal muscle tension, which helps you feel more relaxed.

### Suggestions You Could Put into Practice

- If you are new to exercising, you can start slowly and choose something you enjoy. Start slow and set small goals.
- Be kind to yourself. Every little step in the right direction counts. Everyday activities count too, such as cleaning, gardening, using the stairs...
- Try to use social connections: invite a friend or go outside and interact with other people and nature.
- You can do many activities at home, which involves no cost. Reward yourself for exercising with small treats or incentives.



To watch the brain-changing benefits of exercise with Wendy Suzuki. This video is owned and provided by [TED Talks](#). It was presented at an official TED conference.



## C) Sleep Hygiene

There's a close relationship between sleep and mental health. Living with a mental health problem can affect how well you sleep, and poor sleep can have a negative impact on your mental health.

### Risks of poor sleep

- With lack of sleep, you may feel lonely or isolated because, for example, if you don't have the energy to see people you may struggle to concentrate or make plans and decisions.
- You may feel irritable or not have energy to do things.
- You may have problems with day-to-day life – for example, at work or with family and friends.

### Tips to improve your sleep

1. Try to establish a routine.
2. Relax before you go to sleep: listen to some music, take a bath, meditate.
3. Avoid electronic devices for one or two hours before bed.
4. Use journaling as a way to end your day and get some mental clarity.
5. Take care of yourself. This might include exercising, avoiding coffee and alcohol, spend time outside in nature, call a friend.
6. Ask for help, you are not alone.



*Learn How to improve your sleep with Matthew Walker. This YouTube video is owned and provided by [the Penguin Books UK YouTube channel](#).*



## D) Connection with Nature

Connecting with nature plays an important role in improving our physical and mental health. Here are some of the benefits that come from connecting to nature:

### Benefits of Connecting to Nature

- Nature helps reduce stress. Taking a walk for just 10 minutes in a natural environment can help students feel happier and reduce physical and psychological stress.
- Improves cognitive functions, such as attention, memory and concentration Nature can increase energy levels.
- Being in green environments can increase self-esteem and happiness hormones that elevate our mood and help us feel better about ourselves.
- Increases social interaction: Taking walks in nature can help you make new friends.

### Suggestions You Could Put into Practice

- Open the window when you wake up and for 1 minute observe the sky, the trees.
- Walk to classes.
- Note, feel and listen to nature.
- Watch the sunrise or sunset. Every day it is there for you.
- Invite a colleague or friend to go for a walk, twice a week, along a watercourse or park or beach.
- Use your senses with curiosity at the beginning of the meal. What journey did the food take to reach the plate?
- Study, read or chat in the park. Take off your sneakers and feel the grass beneath your feet.
- Join an environmental association or a movement such as [Roots & Shoots](#)
- Participate to an eco-pedagogical activity such as the [Virtual Youth Forum that took place during 2021 World Environment Day](#)
- Do a mindfulness practice.



*Listen How Mindfulness in Nature Can Transform Us & Climate Change with Sara Overton. This video is owned and provided by [TEDx Talks YouTube channel](#). It was presented at an official TED conference.*



## E) Connection with others

Having close relationships with family or friends provides love, meaning, support and can increase our feelings of self-worth. Our broader social networks, like those in our local community or at school or work, can contribute to a sense of belonging. A longitudinal study in New Zealand concluded that social connection is more predictive of happiness than the academic performance.

### Benefits of Connecting with Others

- It promotes mental and physical health.
- It strengthens the immune system, it lows anxiety and depression.
- It gives meaning and purpose to life. What we often feel only happens to us, actually happens to everyone.
- Realizing our common humanity brings comfort and security. We are an ultrasocial species, designed to cooperate.

### Suggestions You Could Put into Practice

1. Pay attention and curiosity to the small moments of connection in everyday life.
2. Note 4 common attitudes that harm relationships: thinking it's not worth it, criticism, silence, defensive attitude.
3. Try to cultivate the following 4 attitudes that protect relationships: Humor, Gratitude, Forgiveness, and Acceptance. It requires training...
4. Cultivate curiosity about strangers. Challenge prejudices and discover a common ground.
5. Practice acts of generosity, as simple as wishing someone a good day on the street or helping someone.
6. Accept help and support. It's good for those who receive it and for those who support it.
7. Join an association or practice a team sport.
8. Show appreciation for the people in your life by acknowledging them and sharing why you are grateful for them.
9. Practice mindfulness.



*Listen Why Social Connections Matter to Your Health with Tyler Prochnow, Ph.D. This video is owned and provided by [Texas A&M School of Education & Human Development YouTube channel](#).*



## F) What is Wellbeing ?

The neuroscientist Richard Davidson says that wellbeing is a skill that can be trained and developed, based on 4 pillars.



### **Awareness**

Accepting and normalizing thoughts, emotions, physical sensations, impulses. By cultivating a non-judgmental attitude, it allows one to maintain balance and be present.



### **Connection**

Maintain healthy relationships, see the best in ourselves and others. Extend kindness and compassion beyond the group of family and friends.



### **Insight**

Bring curiosity to how the mind operates, understand how thoughts and emotions influence the way we see the world.



### **Purpose**

Identify values, focus on what is really important, find value in what we already have and do.

**Click here >**



Discover the Four Pillars of a Healthy Mind with Richard Davidson. This video is owned and provided by the [Mindfulness Exercises YouTube channel](#).

**Click here >**



Consult the [Healthy Minds Program App](#) for more information.



### III. Exploring Mindfulness: A Journey Through 18 Soothing Exercises

MP4s toolbox is a collection of resources and practices you can use to approach mindfulness in an experiential way. Reading about mindfulness alone cannot fully capture the life-changing potential it offers, just as reading about football cannot turn you into a football player.

In the preceding sections of this toolbox, you delved into the foundational principles of mindfulness, explored the significance of self-care for mental health, and examined various aspects of well-being.

In this section, we invite you to delve deeper into mindfulness through a series of 18 soothing exercises. Please enjoy these suggestions we have selected as they are aligned with the principles and intentions, we wish you to cultivate to foster long-lasting mental and emotional well-being.

The journey we propose is based on **3 pillars**:

- **Attention regulation**
- **Emotion regulation**
- **Insights**

We encourage you to explore them in this sequence, as they promote your capacity to be present in a sequential manner.

#### A) Recap of the Journey : 3 Pillars, 18 Mindfulness Practices

##### 1. ATTENTION REGULATION

1. Grounding
2. Body Scan
3. Mindfulness of breath
4. Mindful Walking
5. eating exercise
6. Mindfulness of sounds
7. sleep better
8. 3 Steps Breathing

##### 2. EMOTION REGULATION

9. 3 Steps Breathing Space/ Coping
10. R.A.I.N
11. Taming the Inner Critic
12. Mindfulness of thoughts

##### 3. INSIGHTS

13. Lovingkindness
14. Compassion
15. Incline to joy
16. Equanimity
17. Connection with nature
18. Allowing change

**Click here >**



*Before you start this sequence, here you can check “Getting Started Instructions” created by Diana Winston and others (see above) for the [UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center \(MARC\)](#), ©2011- 2021 The Regents of the University of California (The UC Regents). **These instructions will introduce you to mindfulness and how to select a posture for the practice.***





## B) First Pillar: Attention Regulation – 8 Mindfulness Practices

### 1. Grounding



Follow a brief practice to gather the attention, soften the body and sense your intention for being present.

This 3:50 minutes audio recording with transcript is a practice owned and provided by [Tara Brach](#).

[Click here >](#)



### 2. Body Scan

The body scan is a practice for paying attention to bodily sensations in a gradual sequence from the feet to the head. It can help to feel more connected to yourself and reduce mental agitation.

This 14:45 minutes audio recording is owned and provided by the [Little, Brown Audio Soundcloud Channel](#) and driven by [Mark Williams](#).

[Click here >](#)



### 3. Mindfulness of Breath



This practice uses the breath to cultivate a state of mindful presence. As we settle with the breath, we can become more sensitive to the changing waves of experience, resulting in increased balance, clarity, and ease.

This 5:30 minutes audio recording is a practice owned and provided by [Diana Winston](#).

[Click here >](#)



### 4. Mindful Walking

By walking mindfully, we actively arrive in the present moment with each step we take. Another way to connect to our breath, the sensations in the body, and the nature around us.


This 3:36 minutes audio recording is a practice owned and provided by [Kristin Neff](#).

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### 5. Eating Exercise



Eating mindfully is a way to practice staying present with all your senses even during activities that we normally do on autopilot while also practicing gratitude for the small things in life.

This 4:43 minutes audio recording is owned and provided by the [Little, Brown Audio Soundcloud Channel](#) and driven by [Mark Williams](#).

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### 6. Mindfulness of Sounds


This practice invites us to listen to sounds as a portal to spacious awareness. It is a particularly nourishing practice for when you are surrounded by nature.

This 3:06 minutes audio recording is a practice owned and provided by [Diana Winston](#).

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### 7. Sleep Better



This practice can help quiet the mind, relax the body, and bring peace to your heart making it easier to fall asleep at night.

This 13:50 minutes audio recording is a practice owned and provided by [Diana Winston](#).

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### 8. Three Steps Breathing

The purpose of this practice is to help you step out of automatic pilot, move into the present moment, and slow down so you can respond more skillfully to stressful situations.

This 6:10 minutes audio recording is owned and provided by the [Mindful health Soundcloud Channel](#) and driven by [Karunavira](#).

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## C) Second Pillar: Emotion regulation – 4 Mindfulness Practices

### 9. Three Steps Breathing Space | Coping

This practice can be effective when difficult thought patterns arise. By taking the time to stop and attend to the present moment, with acceptance and compassion, it may help cope with anxiety and stress.

This 7:00 minutes audio recording is owned and provided by the [Mindful health Soundcloud Channel](#) and driven by [Karunavira](#).

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### 10. R.A.I.N.

This guided practice applies mindfulness and self-compassion to challenging emotions. It is based on the acronym RAIN:

- **R**ecognize what is happening
- **A**llow the experience to be there, just as it is
- **I**nvestigate with interest and care
- **N**urture with self-compassion

This 20:00 minutes audio recording with transcript is a practice owned and provided by [Tara Brach](#).

Click here >



### 11. Dissolving the Inner Critic

A practice to nurture greater mental stability, self-compassion, and genuine acceptance, extending its impact beyond yourself to those around you.

This 12:03 minutes audio recording is a practice owned and provided by [Martin Aylward](#).

Click here >



### 12. Mindfulness of Thoughts

This practice will help you develop greater stability of mind, greater capacity to let things be, and compassion to yourself and others in daily life.

This 10:44 minutes audio recording is a practice owned and provided by [Rebecca Foxx](#).

Click here >





## D) Third Pillar: Insights – 6 Mindfulness Practices

### 13. Loving Kindness



This practice helps to opens us to the heartspace and to meet our experience with kindness.

This 9:00 minutes audio recording with transcript is a practice owned and provided by [Diana Winston](#).

[Click here >](#)



### 14. Compassion

A practice to pause and drop in your presence with an open and gentle heart.

This 6:30 minutes video is owned and provided by the [MasterClass YouTube Channel](#) and driven by [Jon Kabat Zinn](#).

This 20:47 minutes audio recording is owned and provided by [Self-compassion.org](#) and driven by [Kristin Neff](#).

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[Click here >](#)



### 15. Inclining to joy



Although we need to attend to the challenges in our life, with this practice, we can learn to incline our awareness to what allows us to feel nourished, grounded, and joyful.

This 28:20 minutes audio recording is a practice owned and provided by [Mark Coleman](#).

[Click here >](#)



### 16. Equanimity

A practice to respond to stress and find balance and calmness in the midst of a storm.

This 18:52 minutes audio recording is owned and provided by the [UCSD Center for Mindfulness Soundcloud Channel](#) and driven by [Marta Patterson](#).

[Click here >](#)





### 17. Eating Connection with nature



A practice to find connection to the quality of a lake to feel held with care by the ground and cultivate a sense of stability and ease.

This 12:34 minutes audio recording is owned and provided by the [UCSD Center for Mindfulness Soundcloud Channel](#) and driven by [Renee Lewis](#).



### 18. Allowing change

When we're stressed our hearts tighten and we try to control our life. This practice guides us to let go of control and discover the open, tender awareness that allows life to be as it is.

This 19:05 minutes audio recording with transcript is a practice owned and provided by [Tara Brach](#).

