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# Cultivating Self-Awareness and Mindfulness

*Self-awareness is the process of paying attention to your emotions, needs, physical being, and reactions. By becoming aware of the subtle, ongoing responses of the body, emotions, and mind, it is possible to detect patterns and take charge of your responses.*

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## MINDFULNESS PRACTICES

- Breathing exercises
- Gratitude journaling
- Yoga, qi gong, and tai chi
- Guided imagery
- Mindful walking
- Meditation
- Many more! Try being mindful while eating, listening, or playing.

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### *Understanding Self-Awareness*

Awareness ranges from focusing on the present moment and your current physical, mental, and emotional state to understanding your history and future intentions. Being aware of your emotions and physical state allows you to choose how to respond. For instance, instead of letting physical discomfort push you into a grumpy state, you can acknowledge the discomfort and make a conscious choice to overcome it.

When many demands compete for attention or when we are tired, we often fall into rote patterns of emotion and behavior. We eat according to the clock, stay up too late, and react without thinking. We can become trapped in our minds or indulge in immediate gratification too often.

A lack of self-awareness can also lead to poor decisions, poor health, and poor relationships. Living on autopilot is a coping mechanism, yet conscious choices and decisions can dramatically improve your health and wellbeing.

### *Understanding Mindfulness*

Mindfulness practices offer tools to anchor yourself in the present and can increase self-awareness. You can grow your ability to be self-aware and mindful—and every step you take will improve your health and happiness.

As you become more aware of your inner state, be compassionate with yourself. Recognize that there are many ways to practice mindfulness. Experiment to find what works best for you.

### *Practicing Mindful Observation & Reflection*

Take a quiet moment and pay attention to your emotions. Are you feeling happy, angry, sad? Are your emotions reflected in or caused by the state of your body?

Pay attention to your shoulders and neck: can you relax them? As you relax, take a few deep breaths and consider what might be causing your stress, anxiety, tension, or negative thoughts. Reflect on your recent interactions, and then bring your attention back to the present moment.

Think about your toes and how they feel right now. Move your awareness slowly up your body, including your knees, your abdomen, your forearms, your face, and your cheeks. Take a deep breath and resume your day.

### *Become Aware of Your Sleep Needs*

Sit somewhere comfortable. Think about how your body feels. Are you tense, tired, or sore? Pay attention to your thoughts: are you thinking with clarity, or are your thoughts somewhat foggy?

Consider your past few nights of sleep. Are you sleeping enough? Are you sleeping well? Think about any obstacles or challenges that make it harder to sleep. Are there any that you can change?

Take a deep breath and feel your abdomen rise, then fall. Anchor yourself back in the present moment, feeling the air around you, letting the sounds float by, and feeling your weight pressing down.

### *Benefits of Self-Awareness and Mindfulness*

- Self-awareness and mindfulness improve physical and mental health.
- Conscious awareness of your inner state allows you to react intentionally.
- Mindfulness benefits people with a range of conditions, including depression, anxiety, gastrointestinal issues, cardiometabolic concerns, addiction, and fatigue.