




# re-learn to relax

CommonHealth's guide to meditation  
and mindfulness for the busy beginner

When's the last time you  
felt really relaxed,  
like you could totally  
unwind?



I'm not so good at that  
whole sitting still thing  
and I feel too busy to  
slow down anyway!



**We hear you, life moves fast. Those moments of quiet relaxation seem too few and far between.**

**There is a way to slow down and get some real mental and physical health benefits though; it's meditation.**

**Meditation is the simple, scientifically proven brain exercise that helps you be more tuned in to your day and relax by rewiring your brain to deal differently with stress.**

*I used to think meditation was too "out there" for me, but then I tried it and it's really quite straightforward.*



# Too busy to breathe?

Is it really  
worth the  
effort?  
I'm busy!



***Of course you're busy –  
it's a busy world!***

Sometimes it feels like there just aren't enough hours in the day.

Here's the thing; practicing meditation and enjoying its benefits, like feeling happier and less overwhelmed, doesn't require a huge time commitment.

In fact, you can start right now – this moment – by paying attention to your breath.

Your brain and your body will thank you.

**Don't just do something...  
sit there!**

# This is your brain on meditation

**Improved focus on tasks**

(Cal)

**Reduced symptoms of depression, anxiety, and pain similar to the effects of antidepressants**

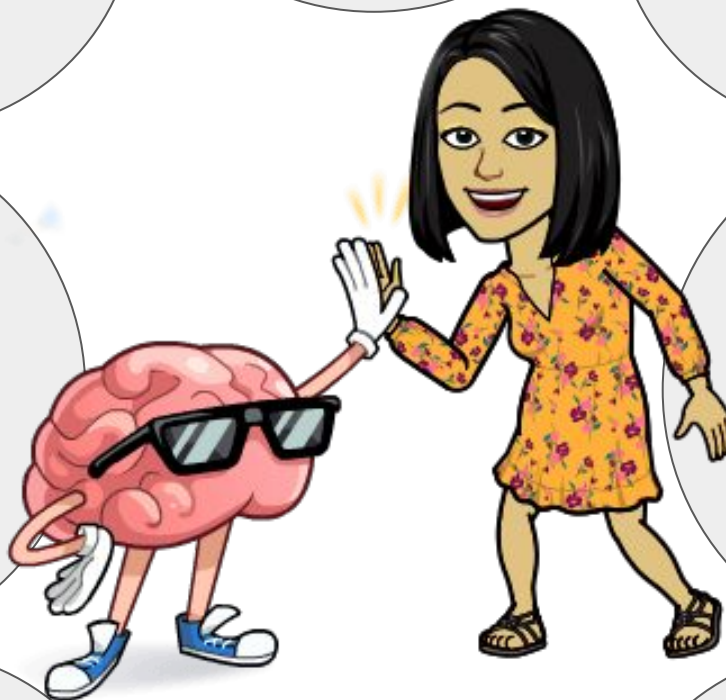
(Johns Hopkins)

**Retains more information**

(Cal)

**Thickness in the hippocampus which controls learning and memory**

(Harvard)



**Less grey matter in the part of the brain associated with stress**

(Harvard)

**Reduced anxiety**

(Stanford)

**More grey matter in the brain associated with self-awareness and compassion**

(Harvard)

**Improved decision making**

(UCLA)

# Your body loves to relax

**Improved sleep  
quality**  
(Harvard)

**Less  
chronic pain**  
(UMass)

**Easier to  
control  
weight**  
(Duke)

**Reduced  
symptoms of  
IBS**  
(Harvard)

**Improved  
immune  
response**  
(Univ of Wisconsin)

**Decreased  
heart rate**  
(Harvard)

**Reduced  
inflammation**  
(Carnegie Mellon)

**Decreased  
blood pressure**  
(Kent State)



Sounds great,  
right?

- Low time commitment
- Tons of mental benefits
- Tons of physical benefits

Read on to get  
started...



# A new perspective

## Today's Lesson: Mindfulness vs. Meditation

Mindfulness is the process of bringing your attention to what's happening in the present moment.

Mindfulness can be developed through the practice of meditation.

Meditation is the action of focusing your mind to achieve a mentally clear state.



# Practice makes it possible

Training, whether scales on the piano or drills on the football field, is what helps you succeed. Meditation is how you practice to have more moments of mindfulness throughout your day.

THROWING A FOOTBALL IS PRETTY SIMPLE,  
BUT COMPLETING A PASS IN A GAME  
UNDER PRESSURE...DIFFERENT STORY.

Meditation is like a bicep curl for your brain. Turning your attention to one thing and observing your thoughts without judgement, results in a more focused, calm mind...especially in times of stress.



Meditation is sitting and doing nothing.  
Anyone can do that, right?

While it may sound simple,  
it's not as easy as you might think.

We're so used to the overstimulation of  
life that it's challenging to pull back  
from it, even briefly.

In meditation, we direct our attention  
inward. It's difficult to quiet a mind  
that's always in overdrive and  
this is why meditation takes practice.

*I can  
do  
this.*



Give yourself 5 minutes to try it on the next page

## The Basics -

Sit tall with your feet flat on the floor.  
Close your eyes and focus on your breathing.  
Breathe in deeply and breathe out slowly.  
Tune in to the rise and fall of your breath.  
If your mind wanders (no problem - that's  
what is supposed to happen), just gently  
bring it back your breath.



### *Don't overcomplicate it*

You are sitting and breathing...you do that all the time. What's different here is that you're paying attention to what your mind is doing. That's it. Suspend judgement - just observe.

### *Be comfortable*

Again, you're just sitting and breathing, so there's no need to have special clothes or fancy equipment...but you do want to reduce distractions so you can focus.

### *Don't wait for perfect conditions*

If you do that, you may be waiting a long time since life is pretty hectic for most of us. Practicing regularly is better than only doing it when the stars are perfectly aligned.

# 5 MINUTE MEDITATION



Minute 1  
Breathe Deeply

Minute 2  
Find Your Pace & Settle In

Minute 3  
Stay Focused

Minute 4  
Relax

Minute 5  
Enjoy the Calm

# Adding moments of calm to your workday

Now that you've tried it - try it again tomorrow morning. Start your day with 5 minutes of seated meditation. Remind yourself that you are grateful to be alive and have 24 brand new hours to live your best.

Sit down and enjoy breakfast at home. Make your commute a quieter time instead of grabbing food on the go and making phone calls on your way to work.

Are you hit with waves of stress as soon as you walk in the door? Refrain from saying or doing anything right away. Come back to your breathing until you can settle down.

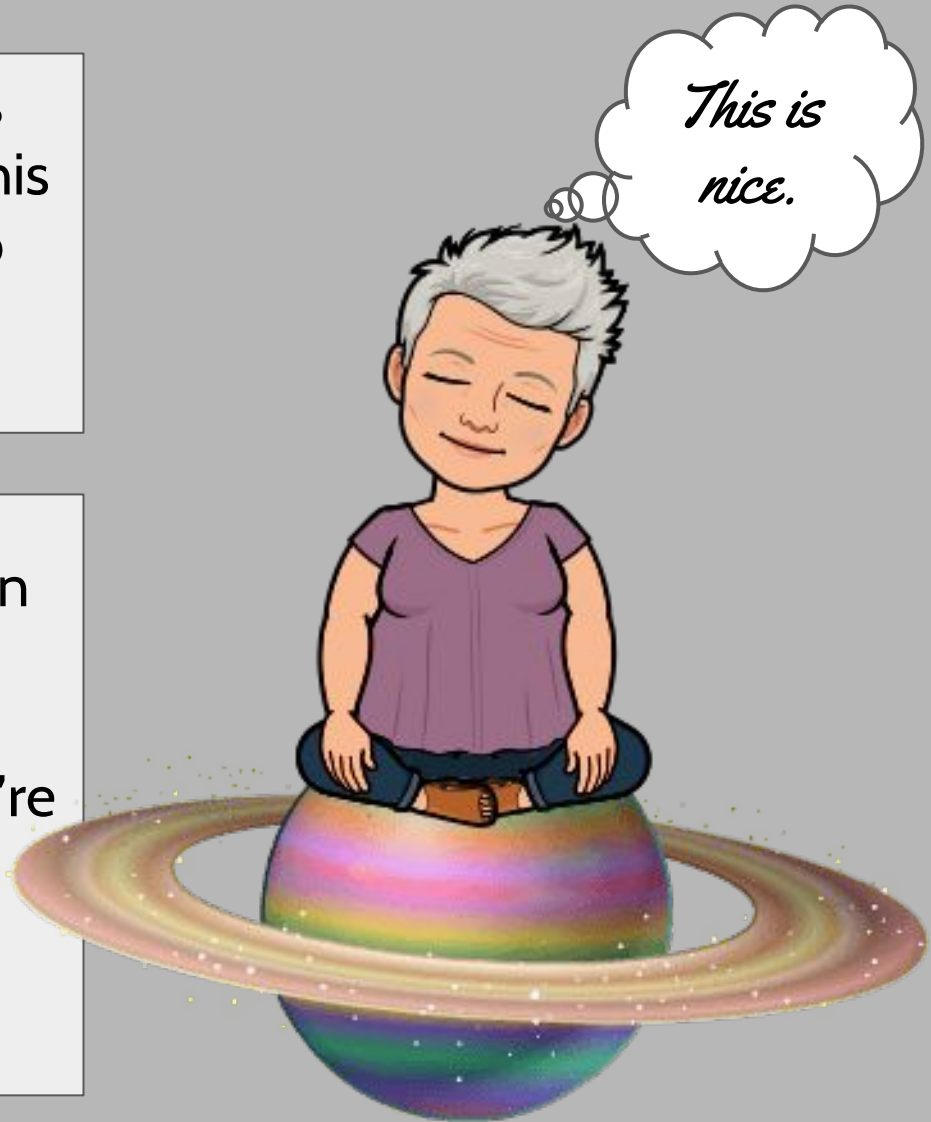
*Taking a water break helps me keep my cool*



At lunch, use the opportunity to change environments. If possible, go outside for a change of scenery.

Take breathing breaks throughout your day. This lets you come back to tasks focused and refreshed.

Take time to relax when you get home before starting on chores. Multitasking means you're never fully present for any one thing, so keep it simple.



## Make it a family affair

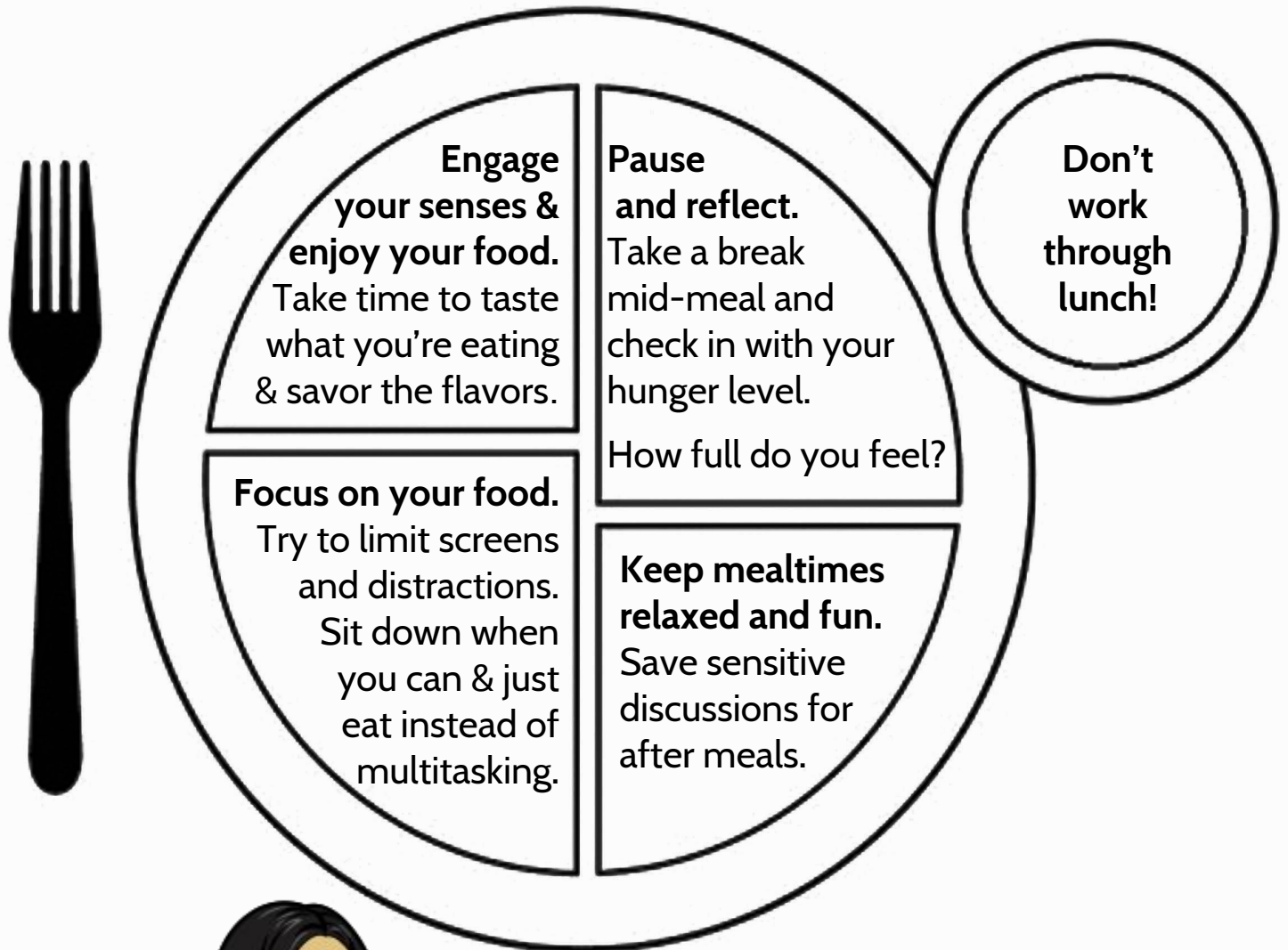
Whether you are five or 95, mindfulness can help you be your best.

Teach your kids mindful meditation - recent studies show kids exhibit more self-control and experience less depression.

Our elders can benefit too. Deep breathing in a peaceful setting can result in reduced blood pressure, less chronic pain, and an overall feeling of well-being.

# A new set of table manners

Mindful eating allows you to enjoy a relaxed relationship with food that can reduce stress-related overeating.



**Keep practicing!**



# Move your body, use your mind



Enjoy Virginia's outdoors -  
Being outside is good for you!

A walking meditation is a great choice for people who feel their best when they move. Try this technique next time you are out for a stroll.

Focus on  
your body

Feel your  
legs lift

Stand tall

Feel your  
arms swing

Feel your  
feet land

When your attention wanders (and it will), bring your mind back to the sensations of your feet touching the ground.

# A bedtime "wind down" for anyone



Bedtime routines help us sleep better. Consider a technique called Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR).

PMR is a fancy way to say that you contract muscles and then relax them. The idea is you'll get a greater relaxation effect if you tighten the muscles first. A big part of this benefit seems to happen because you are focusing your attention on a particular part of your body – your mind is on your muscle.

You can start at your head and work down or start at your toes and work your way up.

# PMR for a relaxing bedtime

Remember to breathe throughout each exercise and relax before moving on to the next area.

**Tighten your facial muscles, clench your jaw and push your tongue to the roof of your mouth. Hold. Relax.**

**Pull your shoulders toward your earlobes. Hold. Relax.**

**Pull your shoulder blades together. Hold. Relax.**

**Straighten each arm and make a fist with each hand. Hold. Relax.**

**Pull your belly button in toward the spine. Hold. Relax.**

**Tighten all the muscles of your lower body including pointing your toes. Hold. Relax.**

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**Visualization is also a helpful tool. Imagine yourself:**

Lying peacefully in a canoe with only blue sky above you

Snuggling in a black velvet hammock in a dark room

As a ball of light shining brighter and brighter then growing dimmer and dimmer

**Sleep is just moments away...**

# Power Up to Power Down

We check our phones on average 80 times a day! This sounds like the opposite of mindfulness, right?

What if we saw our phone habit as an opportunity to be mindful instead of distracted? Start small. The next time you pick up your phone, pay attention to what it feels like in your hands. As you tune in more frequently, you may begin to notice how often it's in your hands.

Maybe consider silencing all but the most urgent alerts. This allows you to schedule regular intervals to read and respond to messages, without jumping at every ding of your phone.

You can also use apps to your advantage when learning a new skill, like meditation.

I'M TRYING TO USE  
MY PHONE BY  
CHOICE INSTEAD OF  
OUT OF HABIT.





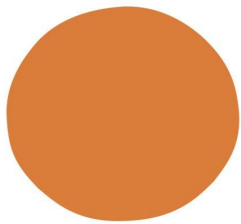
I feel a  
little less  
frazzled.

I know  
right? I'm  
sleeping  
better too.



## Really Useful Apps

If you have a smartphone, you can put some  
mindfulness “tools” in your toolbox.



HEADSPACE®



myStrength

# How to get more help when you or your family need it

From time to time, we could all use a hand in dealing with some of the curve balls life throws us. All state health plans offer enrollees and their dependents easy access to employee assistance programs (EAPs).

In general, care must be authorized in advance, but that's as easy as a phone call. Grab your insurance card and give your EAP a call to see how they can help. The numbers below are right on the back of your card.

## Here are the numbers to call for your EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM:

COVA Care and COVA HDHP  
Anthem Blue Cross & Blue Shield  
1-855-223-9277  
[www.anthemead.com](http://www.anthemead.com)  
Enter Commonwealth of Virginia

COVA HealthAware  
Aetna  
1-888-238-6232  
[www.covahealthaware.com](http://www.covahealthaware.com)  
Username & Password: cova

Kaiser Permanente HMO  
1-866- 517-7042  
[www.achievesolutions.net/kaiser](http://www.achievesolutions.net/kaiser)

The Local Choice - Anthem Blue Cross & Blue Shield  
1-855-223-9277    [www.anthemead.com](http://www.anthemead.com)    Enter Commonwealth of Virginia

# Try a finger labyrinth



Take a breath and place your finger on the arrow. Trace the pattern and clear your mind of extra thoughts. When you reach the center, take a few deep breaths and see how you feel. Trace your path back out and pause again to breathe.



**CommonHealth**

**Questions about mindfulness?**

**Want to let us know how it's  
going for you since  
you started meditating?**

Check in with us at  
[wellness@dhrm.virginia.gov](mailto:wellness@dhrm.virginia.gov)  
or visit  
[www.CommonHealth.virginia.gov](http://www.CommonHealth.virginia.gov)  
for more information!

