

- **Tips for establishing and maintaining a formal mindfulness practice by Dr Sherelle Connaughton**

Please note there are no set requirements about how and when to practise formal mindfulness. Whatever fits your interest, motivation and current schedule is fine and you can just practice informally throughout the day if you wish.

But if you would like to practice meditation more regularly, you might like to try one or more of the following:

- Review the benefits of mindfulness and write down the key ones that you want to cultivate more of in your life.
- Post this list somewhere obvious to help remind you why want to practice and to act as a visual cue to help motivate you.
- Consider adding some other cues to your list of benefits to help further inspire you (e.g., a favourite quote or image).
- Set a small, attainable goal (e.g., 5 minutes three times a week, or 5 minutes once a day) and feel free to extend this if you have time and wish to. Always start small and simple until you feel ready to do more.
- Write down your intention to practice more regularly and tell a friend or relative. By voicing your commitment, you have a better chance of making good on your promise (and they can help prompt or motivate you).
- If you can, try to practice at a regular time each day (e.g., as soon as you get of bed; after you have showered and gotten dressed; before breakfast; while your tea brews; as your computer boots up; before lunch; while on public transport; or before you go to bed etc). Attaching your practice to another activity that happens regularly each day can help make it part of your routine and reduce the likelihood of you forgetting to do it.
- If possible, consider having a set place to sit for formal practice (but also continue to practice mindfulness wherever you can in everyday life). Practicing in the same spot can help build a sense of routine and just seeing this space can sometimes be enough to prompt you to practice.

- It is not essential, but it can be nice to place a candle, an inspiring photo or other meaningful objects near your practice space, to help remind you of your intention and heighten awareness.
- Reduce possible distractions. Remaining calm when all around you is busy is a primary aim of mindfulness, but if you find noise disruptive, do what you can to reduce this (e.g., turn your phone to silent; put pets outside; or practice when children sleeping).
- Borrow or purchase books, audio or video recordings to help you explore mindfulness from different perspectives.
- Attend local classes, workshops and retreats for knowledge, inspiration and to meet like minded people.
- Use a practice record or a regular journal so you can clearly see how often you practice. You might also like to write down what helps and what hinders your practice, to help clarify these and brainstorm possible solutions for any obstacles.
- Remember that some practice is always better than none.
- Have faith in your own ability and in the process of mindfulness as a vehicle for change. If you find establishing a regular practice is difficult, consider the benefits of exploring this and trying some new strategies, versus staying in your comfort zone and not changing much.
- Friendship is often stronger than willpower, so consider finding time to practice with a friend either physically (e.g., practicing together during your lunch break at work) or practicing alone at home at an agreed time. You could even pair up with someone who is working on a completing different goal in their own time, but is willing to encourage and support you (e.g., they might be trying to exercise more often, while you are trying to meditate and you can simply discuss your progress with each other at the end of each week or month).
- Having goals can be helpful, but mindfulness is not outcome-oriented. Think of your practice as 'checking in' rather than aiming to get somewhere or achieve anything. Observe yourself as you are today and know that tomorrow will most certainly be different.
- Rest when needed and remember that your practice routine may shift considerably over time, especially if you are a new parent, unwell, caring for someone, grieving and/or facing major personal or professional life challenges. Of course, these are often the times when we can benefit most from regular practice, but sometimes it can be difficult to prioritise it. Hence we need to be realistic about what we can manage and to consider aiming for a few brief mindful moments over a day, if a longer formal practice does not seem feasible.

- If you fall away from regular practice, just come back to it gently whenever you can, without being too hard on yourself. It is quite common to have to recommence a regular practice routine many times, but each time you start you will have learned something about yourself and it often gets easier to maintain a regular practice over time.

Please note this is quite an extensive list and I do not expect learners to implement every single suggestion (and certainly not all at once). But I do hope some ideas might appeal that you can focus on right now and that you might save a copy of this list so you can experiment with some other tips in the future.

Good luck!