

how to be more mindful at work

Think you're too busy to meditate? Clinical psychologist Cassandra Dunn has a few tips for incorporating mindfulness into your workday that'll help you stay cool, calm and collected from nine to five and beyond.

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The benefits of mindfulness and meditation have been proven categorically and documented widely. Being more mindful will help you reduce stress and anxiety, lower your risk of depression, improve your capacity to focus and make decisions, increase your productivity, improve the quality of your relationships and even heal your body at a cellular level.

And yet, despite the overwhelming evidence to support its benefits, many of us still struggle to find the time to sit in meditation every day. Or perhaps you're someone who does manage to carve out that time, and yet as soon as you find yourself frantically searching for a lost school shoe or having to deal with a prickly colleague, all of your best intentions to remain calm and non-reactive go straight out the window.

If you're interested in reaping all the rewards that mindfulness has to offer – both in your personal and professional life – there are a few tools you can use to generate immediate and tangible results. Below are some suggestions for incorporating some calm into your busy working day...

Practise single-tasking

Oh, how we love to multitask, especially when we're busy! Unfortunately, this is another area where the research is abundantly clear. Multitasking does not increase your productivity; in fact, quite the opposite. When you continually switch your attention from one task to another, the extra time it takes for your brain to refocus ultimately reduces your productivity by as much as 40%. Most of us now know this, but we insist on multitasking anyway because it feels more productive. I encourage you to intentionally choose one task and stick to it for a given period of time. Resist the urge to flick from one thing to another (including checking your email).

Remember to breathe

When you're powering through the workday, responding to emails, fielding questions, running to meetings and working to deadlines, your brain's fight-or-flight system might be stuck in the 'always on' position. That constant pulse of nervous energy keeps your body producing stress hormones, which over time can be damaging to your physical and mental health. Try setting a couple of reminders on your phone throughout the day to stop and take long, slow, deep breaths. This is like pressing the reset button on your nervous system. Check in to see how your body is feeling. Loosen any tension and then continue with your day from a place that's a little calmer and more centred.

Rethink stress

Speaking of the stress response, there's research to indicate that how you think about stress makes a huge difference to how your body is affected by it. If you're highly stressed and you believe that stress is toxic, you're more likely to experience negative health consequences, whereas if you're equally stressed but you view stress as a challenge or opportunity for growth, your body is protected from those negative consequences. Being mindful means choosing where to place your attention. When you become aware of physical sensations such as an elevated heart rate or butterflies in your stomach, you might choose to see this as evidence your body is preparing you for a positive challenge, getting more oxygen to all the cells in your body and priming you to do your very best work.

Walk mindfully

Using daily activities as a cue to be fully present is a great way to incorporate mindfulness into your regular routine – and walking is something that we all do (or should be doing!) each day. Every time you get up to walk to a meeting, chat with a colleague or head to the coffee machine, take the opportunity to get out of your busy head for those few moments and connect with the sensation of movement in your legs and your feet hitting the floor. You don't have to walk at a snail's pace to walk mindfully, but you might also use the opportunity to remind yourself to slow down and breathe.

Express appreciation

Cultivating gratitude is a highly effective way of injecting positivity into your day, and is proven to enhance relationships, increase satisfaction with life and strengthen resilience. Even if you don't love your job, there are no doubt many aspects of your work and the people you work with that you can appreciate. You might thank people more sincerely for the contribution they make or email someone to acknowledge something they've done well – and then, at the end of the day, mentally list three things you're grateful for. It's a surefire way to not only boost your mood, but to make a positive difference in someone else's life – the ripple effect of practising mindfulness. ☺