

# 7 Ways to Stay Present

Discover some strategies to help you get out of your head and start living more in the moment.



When people talk about staying present or living in the moment they are often talking about mindfulness, or “paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). This type of mindful, present-focused living keeps you out of your head, stops you from ruminating on things that went wrong in the past, and lessens the amount of time you spend worrying about what could go wrong in the future. As a result, living in the moment can enable you to enjoy the moment more and feel like your life is more meaningful or fulfilling.

In fact, these types of interventions have been shown to have positive effects on both anxiety and depression (Khoury et al, 2013). That's in part because when we get stuck in our heads we might not be able to notice the good things that are right in front of us.

But learning how to be more present isn't always easy. If we are the kind of person whose mind wanders and we are always imagining or thinking about something, how do we pull ourselves back to the present moment? Here are some strategies and techniques to try.

## 1. Try Mindfulness Meditation

Guided mindfulness meditations can help you build the skills that make it easier to live in the present moment. They do this by teaching you to focus on your bodily sensation and your breathing. By practicing focusing on your breath, you are really practicing focusing on the present moment. Below is a mindfulness meditation for you to try.

<https://youtu.be/cVeyjwnxIIA>

## 2. Try the Raisin Exercise

The raisin exercise involves using all five senses to explore a raisin. First, observe its appearance, noticing each crevice. Then notice how it feels in your hand. Then put it up to your nose and notice its smell. Then put the raisin on your tongue and pay attention to how it feels. Then bite into it and notice how it tastes. Finally, chew and swallow it, noticing how it feels going into your body. This exercise can help you become more aware of your senses and physical experiences. You can extend this skill by observing other things in your life to help yourself be more present.

## 3. Practice Gratitude

Gratitude is thought to be an orientation towards noticing and appreciating the positive things in the world. Gratitude is strongly related to well-being (Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010), and it can't exist without first living in the present moment. That's because if we're not present, we won't notice all the things around us that we might be grateful for—things like the smell of fresh-cut grass, the feel of the wind on our cheeks, or the sight of a flower growing between sidewalk squares in the middle of a city. By working to practice gratitude, we'll help cultivate our "awareness" skills and as a result, be more present and appreciative.

## 4. Stop Rumination Cycles

Rumination is "a mode of responding to distress that involves repetitively and passively focusing on symptoms of distress and on the possible causes and consequences of these symptoms" (Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008). When we ruminate, we stay fixated on our problems, our feelings, or our experiences, and we don't take action in the present to resolve them. As a result, rumination is associated with greater levels of depression and anxiety.

When we live in the present, we may still have negative emotions about things that happen to us. But instead of turning them over and over again in our minds, we take action to change those emotions in the moment. For example, if we're mad about something our romantic partner did, instead of thinking about how rude they were, we go and talk to them, tell them how we feel, and request that they behave differently next time.

## 5. Try Box Breathing

Box breathing is a type of controlled breathing that involves taking slow breaths in and out. Focusing on our breathing helps us practice focusing on something that is happening in the now while also calming down our physiology and reducing stress. If you want to try box breathing, check out the video below to be guided through it.

<https://youtu.be/tEmt1Znux58>

## 6. Try The Body Scan Meditation

The body scan exercise involves bringing attention to your body. Start by closing your eyes and shifting from one region of the body to the next, paying attention to any sensations you notice. For example, do you notice tightness in your back, a knot in your stomach, or an itch on your foot? By practicing paying attention to what's going on inside of you at this moment, you can build your skills and hopefully make it easier for yourself to stay present.

## 7. Take Mindful Photos

Maybe you're someone who has a hard time keeping your mind from buzzing. Then maybe it'll help you to use a tool to stay present. Try snapping a few photos each day. Focus on taking pictures of things you never noticed before. *Hmm, I never realized that house was red. I can't believe I never noticed that my dog has a spot that looks like Elvis. Or, wow, that candy has a quote on its wrapper that I never saw before.* By taking these photos we may be able to help remind ourselves to notice things more.

## Final Thoughts on Living in the Moment

Living in the present moment is a great skill that can be extremely helpful for boosting mental health and well-being. Luckily, there are a number of ways to build and grow this skill. Hopefully, these tips here provided you with some activities that are a good fit and make a positive impact on your life.

### References

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