

# USING YOUR 5 SENSES TO KEEP YOUR SENSES

We're all in uncharted territory, facing new challenges against a backdrop of uncertainty. It is difficult to find time and space in this new reality to prioritise our wellbeing. Many of us feel far from calm, grounded or centred.

But what if you could take short moments throughout your day to reduce stress and anxiety and improve your wellbeing? Mindfulness might just be a tool in your pandemic survival toolkit to help you do exactly this.

Mindfulness is about turning your attention to the present moment and to the world around you. Done regularly, mindfulness improves happiness and wellbeing, increase resilience, benefit mental health as well as physical health.

Mindfulness is one of the best ways to be aware and Being Aware is one of the key elements in the 5-Ways to Wellbeing.

Just like our bodies, our minds need training to function at their best. Mindfulness is a form of mental training that supports the mind to be more focused, effective, and present to what we are doing as we are doing it.

Here are some short exercises, which use each of your five senses to help you survive and thrive during lockdown and beyond.

*Think of the mind as a muscle and mindfulness as the exercise to keep the mind muscle strong and resilient!*

## 5 WAYS TO WELLBEING

These 5 ways have been shown to improve personal sense of wellbeing across the life span.



## ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR 5 SENSES

*These activities only take a minute or two and the whole family can do them!*

### SMELL

#### ACTIVITY 1 – SMELL A FLOWER (GREAT FOR KIDS!)

- Find a strong-smelling flower or leaf
- Eucalyptus or mint leaves are perfect
- Close your eyes for a moment
- Really inhale the aroma
- Crush the petals or leaves and inhale again
- Notice if the smell has changed or is stronger



*Using our sense of smell for this activity can promote deep breathing and connect us to nature – stop and smell the roses!*

#### ACTIVITY 2 – RANDOM SMELL

We only really use our nose when our sense of smell is hijacked (think of the wafting smell of a barbecue or that coffee in the morning) or, when we are trying to detect something (what's that rotten smell?). But there are always so many smells around us that we often don't notice.

Take a moment to engage your sense of smell and see if you can identify a smell that has always been there but which you may not have previously noticed.

*Our sense of smell can sometimes be dulled by our other more dominant senses. Focusing on smells and pinpointing them is great for focusing our attention. Using our nose also reminds us to breathe deeply, which we already know is a great way to get mindful!*

### SOUND

#### ACTIVITY 1 – PLAY MY FAVOURITE SONG

Play a song that you particularly love or enjoy...

- See if you can discover something new about it
- Notice sounds, background instruments, harmonies or notes that you haven't heard before
- Listen carefully to the words and see if they take on a different meaning



*Music is a wonderful way to tune in, connect to emotions and sooth your soul. We all hear music differently and listening to well-loved songs presents an opportunity to discover different things about it.*

#### ACTIVITY 2 – REALLY LISTENING

Sometimes when we are in conversation, we are distracted and unable to properly listen to the other person. Our attention drifts towards our own thoughts and concerns. To listen mindfully...

- Bring your attention to the whole person speaking
- Notice the sound and rhythm of their voice and their facial expressions
- When your mind drifts off into your own thoughts, gently bring your attention back to the person talking

*Mindful listening can improve the quality of your relationships and your capacity to be supportive and empathic. Be curious about what is being said.*

#### ACTIVITY 3 – SOUNDS OF NATURE (GREAT FOR KIDS!)

- Stop and identify 3 sounds outside
- For example, birds, rain, trees, dogs, wind
- Or sounds in the distance, like traffic or people's voices

*Connecting with the world around reminds us that we are part of a bigger world.*

# TASTE

## ACTIVITY 1 – CUP OF TEA

As the weather gets colder, cups of tea (or coffee or chai) become a daily ritual. You can also turn your cuppa into a quick mindfulness exercise...

- When you've made your cup of tea
- Instead of looking at your phone, multitasking or drinking it on autopilot
- Just take a moment to savour the first few sips
- Feel the warmth in your mouth and especially taste the flavours in your cup
- See how many different flavours you can taste

*We all know that enjoying little things is important, but often we do little things mindlessly. Savouring something as simple as a cup of tea can also be a perfect reminder of the beauty in ordinary moments.*

## ACTIVITY 2 – BRUSH YOUR TEETH

- As soon as you put the toothbrush into your mouth, notice all the amazing tastes and sensations, including the invigorating and tingly mint flavour and sensations of the cool water



- If stressful thoughts about the day ahead hijack your attention, just refocus back onto the minty taste while brushing your teeth

*Mindfulness can turn mundane tasks into opportunities for taking a short mindful moment. Brushing your teeth can be a chore...or, it can be an absolute pleasure. This activity turns it into a massage for your gums and an invigorating experience.*

## ACTIVITY 3 – MINDFUL CHOCOLATE (GREAT FOR KIDS!)

You don't need us to tell you how to eat and enjoy chocolate! But, you can elevate this already wonderful experience even more by taking the time to enjoy a single piece for as long as possible. Allow the chocolate to melt in your mouth, paying attention to the changing taste as it does.

*Many of us overeat, binge eat or feel guilty after eating unhealthy foods – especially chocolate. This activity will enhance an already pleasurable experience and mindful eating can replace overeating.*

# TOUCH

## ACTIVITY 1 – DROP AN ANCHOR

You can do this activity wherever you are – sitting down or standing up, walking or staying still...

- Feel your feet
- Direct your attention into your feet
- Pay attention to the sensations in your feet – they are always on, even if we don't notice them
- Tune into the temperature – are they hot, cold or neutral?
- Are they damp or dry?
- Is anything touching them?
- What subtle sensations can you feel?
- Maybe you notice popping, tingling or a pins-and-needle type sensation?

*This activity can take you out of 'thinking mode' and into 'being mode'. Your feet carry you throughout the day, but often we are completely unaware of the feelings and sensations in our feet. Directing our attention in this way can be grounding and can help us pause for a moment.*

## ACTIVITY 2 – STOP AND BREATHE

Take three long, deep breaths – wherever you are, eyes open or closed – it doesn't matter.

- Pay attention to where you notice your breath most obviously - in your nose, your chest, your belly?

- Now, take another three breaths. This time direct your attention to the edges of your nostrils
- On each inhale, notice the cool air whistling into your nostrils
- On each exhale, notice that the temperature of the air is warmer

*Breathing is necessary for survival, but we pay very little attention to our breath. Breathing is connected to our nervous system, which makes it a perfect circuit breaker when we're feeling overwhelmed.*

## ACTIVITY 3 – TEDDY BEAR BREATHING (GREAT FOR KIDS!)

Grab a teddy bear or favourite soft toy...

- Lie down with your little one on the floor or on the bed
- Get comfy and everyone lay a soft toy on their chest
- Place your arms gently by your sides
- Imagine your breath filling up your lungs
- Imagine your breath filling up the toy on your chest
- Feel the toy moving up and down
- Try not to let the toy fall off for the whole minute



*Using a special item can make mindfulness activities exciting and even more soothing for kids. It can be both a game and a powerful way to help kids and parents to feel calm and centred.*

# SIGHT

## ACTIVITY 1 – FIND A COLOUR (GREAT FOR KIDS!)

Pick a colour, any colour...

- Scan your immediate environment
- Identify at least three things that are your colour
- If you can find five items, even better!

*Actively identifying things around us can be useful, especially in moments of acute stress. This exercise can be a circuit breaker to our fight/flight response and help us to feel calm and rational.*

## ACTIVITY 2 – FEATHER BREATHING (GREAT FOR KIDS!)

Grab a feather, or if you don't have a feather, a tiny piece of paper will do just fine...

- As you inhale, lift the feather or paper as high in the air as possible

- Breath out as you let it fall to the ground
- Watching it dance and flutter down as it falls
- Making your out-breath longer will make you calmer

*Doing it as part of a game is a great way to engage everyone in the family.*

## ACTIVITY 3 – A UNIQUE LEAF (GREAT FOR KIDS!)

Patterns in a leaf are as unique and individual as our fingerprints or a snowflake – no two are the same...

- Find a leaf you like and hold it up to light
- Marvel at the patterns, colours, veins and textures



*Focussing on something unique in nature reminds us of the beauty of the world we live in. Admiring something beautiful brings perspective and joy.*

## FREE APPS AND WEBSITES WITH MINDFULNESS EXERCISES

- » [smilingmind.com.au](http://smilingmind.com.au) — Great for adults and kids
- » [headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app](http://headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app) — Great for adults and kids
- » [insighttimer.com](http://insighttimer.com) — Great for adults and kids
- » [shambhala.com/sittingstilllikeafrog](http://shambhala.com/sittingstilllikeafrog) — A great set of recordings for little kids and for parents

Send us your creative ideas for how to stay mindful on Instagram @STREATMelbourne