

Mindfulness Tools

METHOD 1: REFLECT

Keeping a simple log of good things that have happened every day can effect overall happiness over time. After a while, the practice can retrain physicians to notice gratifying moments as they occur instead of at the end of the day or not at all, according to Rachel Remen, a professor of clinical medicine at UCSF School of Medicine, who teaches a similar technique to her students. Here's how to do it.

Step 1: Find a quiet, private place at the end of the day.

Step 2: Looking back on the day, identify anything that brought you joy or made you feel gratitude.

Step 3: Write them down.

Step 4: Do it again tomorrow.

CASE STUDY

A study conducted by two university psychologists showed that when people write down things that they're grateful for on a daily basis, they are more optimistic, exercise more, have more positive feelings about their lives, and have fewer doctor's visits than those that record any daily events or those that record just negative ones.

Exercise Worksheet

METHOD 2: MOVE

"Moving Qigong," as demonstrated by Yang Yang, the founder of the Center for Taiji and Qigong Studies in New York City, is a classic exercise known for generating energy through deep breathing. It can be done on its own or in combination with other Qigong practices. During his decades of study, Yang has seen Moving Qigong help with fatigue, balance, range of motion and coordination.

The entire exercise and detailed instructions can be found online at bit.ly/1dv7dwt. A condensed version appears below.

Step 1: Stand with your feet a little wider than shoulder-width.

Step 2: Move your arms in a circular pattern.

Step 3: Starting from your core, raise your arms with your elbows bent upwards. As they reach the top of their trajectory, open your arms wide and bring them back down and together toward your core. Take a deep breath in as your arms go up and exhale when your arms come down.

Step 4: Breathe. Smile. Repeat.

CASE STUDY

During randomized controlled trials, Qigong and taiji have been shown to improve immune function, reduce chronic pain like arthritis and fibromyalgia, increase lower body strength, improve functional balance and reduce falls, improve cardiovascular health, and sleep quality.

METHOD 3: LISTEN

Multi-tasking may be a necessary consequence of a busy practice, but studies show that quality of care suffers. Mindfulness, which includes techniques like meditation and journaling, can help physicians focus.

Here's an exercise that the University of Wisconsin's Department of Family Medicine teaches its clinicians.

Pause: Before you enter an exam room, stop and take a few breaths. On your out breath, think about releasing all of your mental clutter. Concentrate on your breathing to bring your next patient into focus.

Presence: During the patient encounter, stay open and aware of what's happening in the present moment. Take in the conversation without judgement, and resist the urge to compare your experience to the patient's. Listen with the goal of understanding.

Proceed: Create a health plan based on what you learned. The University of Wisconsin reminds providers to "respond skillfully, compassionately, and with positive intention to whatever needs attention in this moment."

CASE STUDY

A 2010 study that looked at 70 primary care physicians taking part in an eight-week mindfulness course followed by a 10-month maintenance course demonstrated both short-term and long-running gains in well-being and attitude about patient-centered care.



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