

Taking in the Good

Mindfulness Worksheet

Date / Time:

So far today, have you brought kind awareness to your:

Thoughts? Heart? Body? None

To begin this Meditation, please bring kind awareness to

- why you chose this topic
- how your belly, chest, and head each feel when you reflect on this topic
- the emotions that you can associate with these visceral feelings
- the positive or negative impact of any stories you believe in regarding this topic
- the fact that many others are feeling similarly about this topic as you
- how you might feel with increased awareness around this topic
- when you can apply increased mindfulness to this topic in your day-to-day life



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■ PURPOSE / EFFECTS

Neuroscience shows that memory has a negative bias. It is much easier to remember the bad stuff that has happened to us than the good. This leads to needless suffering and a generally pessimistic outlook.

Taking in the Good allows us to focus on positive experiences and to let go of negative ones. It is not about putting a happy shiny face on things, nor is it about turning away from the hard things in life. But it is about nourishing a solid well-being, contentment, and peace inside that is a rock, a refuge, a home base you can always return to and come from.

The result of this is a gradual improvement in a general sense of wellbeing, as well as a reduction in the painfulness of negative memories.

■ METHOD

Turn positive facts into positive experiences. Actively look for good news, particularly the little stuff of daily life that's all around: the faces of children, a sense of your own tenacity, the smell of an orange, a memory from a happy vacation, a minor success at work, and so on.

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Then, bring a mindful awareness to it, opening up to it, letting it affect you. It's like preparing a meal: rather than just looking at it, dig in with a big spoon!

2. Savor the experience. It's delicious! Make it last by keeping your attention on it for 5, 10, even 20 seconds. Try not to jump onto something else. Focus on the sensations and emotions of the experience. Let the experience be big and strongly felt, filling your body. For example, allow the feeling of being liked to bring warmth to your whole chest.

3. Pay particular attention to the rewarding aspects of the experience, like how fulfilling and cozy it feels to get a big hug from a child.

4. Imagine or feel that the experience is sinking deeply into your mind and body, like warm sun on a T-shirt, water into a sponge, or a jewel placed in your heart. Keep relaxing your body and absorbing the experience.

5. Healing. This is an option, extra step. Here you use positive experiences to soothe, balance, and even replace negative ones. When a negative memory or feeling arises, allow your positive experience (that you cultivated in the previous steps) arise at the same time. Hold these two experiences within yourself at the same time.

When two things are held in mind at the same time, they begin connecting with each other. That's one reason why talking about hard things in a supportive relationship – with friends, or a teacher or therapist – is often so healing: painful material gets infused with the comfort, encouragement, and closeness you experience with the other person.

Over time, this has a strong healing effect on negative material.

HISTORY

This method was created by psychologist Rick Hanson.

CAUTIONS

Getting the benefits of this method requires repeated practice over a long period of time. It is not so much a “quick fix,” as a long term strategy for improving your wellbeing.

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■ NOTES

The longer that something is held in awareness and the more emotionally stimulating it is, the more neurons that fire and thus wire together, and the stronger the trace in memory (Lewis, 2005).

While you've been savoring it, your amygdala has been busily highlighting its positive emotional meaning for your hippocampus, which packages the experience for storage in long-term memory.

Further, sometimes you might like to intensify the experience by deliberately enriching it. For example, if you are savoring something related to a relationship, intentionally calling up a strong feeling of being loved by others will help stimulate oxytocin and deepen the sense of relatedness.

