

# Informal Mindfulness: Anytime & Everywhere

*“Wash the dishes relaxingly, as though each bowl is an object of contemplation. Consider each bowl as sacred. Follow your breath to prevent your mind from straying. Do not try to hurry to get the job over with. Consider washing the dishes the most important thing in life.”*

— Thich Nhat Hanh, author of *Peace Is Every Step*, nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Mindfulness is a quality of attention you can bring to anything and everything you do throughout your day. Instead of multitasking or being on autopilot, you can choose to “mindfultask” and do one thing at a time with your full attention and in an embodied way. And similar to your formal meditation practice, if thoughts or emotions arise, notice them like clouds moving through the sky of your awareness and then shift your attention back to your breath and your body and noticing your five senses.

Choose at least one of the following activities to practice for the next week.

1. **Washing hands.** Be aware of the posture of your body, the temperature of the water, the smell of the soap, the movement of your hands and arms.
2. **Brushing your teeth.** Be aware of how your hand holds the toothbrush, the movement of your arm, the feel and sound of the brush on your teeth, the smell and taste of toothpaste.
3. **Taking a shower or bath.** Awareness of water—its temperature and how it sounds and feels when it hits your body—and the smell of soap and shampoo. Be aware of your posture, movements, and mood.
4. **When dressing and undressing,** notice your posture and how you reach for the clothes and how they feel on your skin as you slip them on or off. Breathe.
5. **Washing dishes.** Notice your posture, the movement of your hands and arms, your feet making contact with the ground, the look and feel of the dishes, the feel of the water, how it looks and sounds, the smell of the soap. Are you doing them slowly or rushing to get done? Be aware of your mood. Breathe.
6. **Eating a meal.** Sense your arms and legs. See the food, the shapes and colors. Smell it. Pause to consider from where it came and how it ultimately reached your table. Notice any feelings of anticipation. Be aware of reaching for the food, bringing it to your mouth. Notice the taste and texture of the food as you chew and swallow. Notice any impulse to rush through this bite in order to go on with the next. Notice thoughts and feelings that arise and come back to your breath, your body, your five senses.



7. **Driving.** Turn your cell phone and radio off and focus on the driving. Be aware of your posture, the pressure of your hands on the steering wheel, your body making contact with the seat, and your foot on the gas pedal/brake. Notice what parts of your body are tense or relaxed. What is your breathing like? Be with sights and sounds as they arise and pass away. Use beginner's mind to see your old route with fresh eyes. (Or you might try a new route.)
8. **Stopping at a red light.** Allow this to be a moment to pause, breathe, and look at the sky and the surrounding scene. Become aware of your posture, and notice the sensation of your hands on the wheel. How tightly are you holding the wheel? Be aware of your body making contact with the seat and your feet making contact with the floor, the brake. What sort of thoughts and feelings arise? What is your mood?
9. **When your phone rings or dings,** instead of rushing to answer a call or text or email, allow yourself to pause, notice what other sounds you hear, relax your face, sense your arms and legs, and breathe. Feel your arm reaching for the phone and what it feels like to hold the phone in your hand.
10. **Your favorite song:** listen to your favorite song with your full attention. Listen closely to the lyrics and their meaning. Be mindful of each word and phrase. Listen to the sounds of different instruments. Pay attention to the guitar, bass, drums, vocals, and any other instruments that you hear in the music. Be mindful of the things you have never noticed in the music that you have listened to many times.
11. **Five details:** any place, anywhere, pause and observe and briefly describe five details you would not have noticed otherwise. These could include anything you are experiencing with your five senses—sights, sounds, smells, tastes, or touch—for example the blue sky, the sound of a bird, the breeze on your skin, etc.
12. **Mindful walking** (in the office, at home, to and from your car, shopping, etc.). Notice your posture, the feel of your body moving, how your legs and arms move with each step, the feel of your feet contacting the ground, your breathing, sights, sounds. (For a more detailed description, please see the Mindful Walking handout.)