

MIND MATTERS



Messages for mindfulness

Dr Narjes Gorjizadeh shows us how to turn the distracting nature of modern life to our advantage by using each distraction as an opportunity for practising mindfulness

Mindfulness is one of the best ways to enhance our attention. Mindfulness is an ancient technique and a scientific process that trains the mind to learn to be focussed. Contrary to what distraction does, mindfulness trains our mind to remain in the moment and therefore increases our attention span.

Distracted seems to be a natural element of today's lifestyle. Gadgets and features of modern technology bring us more comfort and accessibility, but they come at a significant cost. They disconnect us from ourselves and disrupt one of the essential skills that we human beings need to thrive in life—the ability to pay attention.

All the constant beeps, dings, rings, and buzzes that come from our smartphones and other digital devices fragment our attention and wire our brain for distraction. Also, researchers say that when we hear a notification sound, our heart rate goes up, and we feel anxious until we check what the notification was for.

It is a natural tendency of an untrained mind to get distracted. Our brain loves novelty; it thinks there might be something better in the next new thing, and it rewards us whenever we get distracted. Modern lifestyle feeds this quality of the brain and trains our mind to crave for more distraction. But the long-term effect is detrimental to our brain. Constant distraction has a negative impact on our performance, our productivity, and our ability to focus, not to mention its detrimental influence on our relationships and sense of happiness. Moreover, research shows that

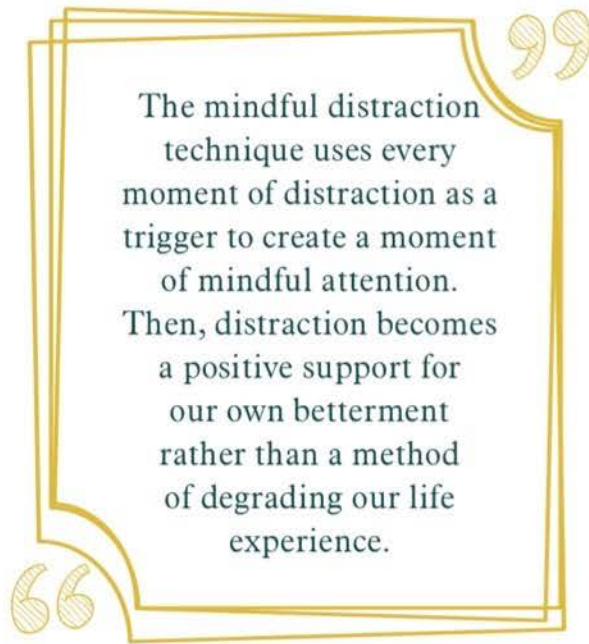
distraction decreases our attention span and leads to stress and anxiety.

Smartphone addiction

Nowadays, many people are addicted to their smartphones. Research shows that adults check their phones 52-80 times a day. Staying focussed on one task is becoming a challenge for most people these days. We often feel a need to check our emails or social media feeds frequently to see if something is happening, even when we don't hear any notification sound.

Advances in technology is a positive thing; it makes our life more enjoyable and more comfortable. However, with any great discovery and advances in technology comes the necessity of using it responsibly so that it benefits us rather than harms us. Unfortunately, removing distractions in this fast-paced modern world does not sound realistic despite the fact that distraction is disrupting our attention. And this is so, although the ability to remain focussed is one of the key factors that define the quality of our life and our level of happiness.

The good news is that there is a way to use distraction in a positive way. We can minimise the negative effects of distraction



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by consciously enhancing our ability to pay attention, and we can let the distraction itself be a reminder for us to practise attention. This is a technique called 'mindful distraction.' Being exposed to constant distraction creates the habit of being distracted, and the mindful distraction technique creates the habit of paying attention.

To simplify it further, the mindful distraction technique uses every moment of distraction as a trigger to create a moment of mindful attention. Then, distraction becomes a positive support for our own betterment rather than a method of degrading our life experience.

Mindfulness is one of the best ways to enhance our attention. Mindfulness is an ancient technique and a scientific process that trains the mind to learn to be focussed. Contrary to what distraction does, mindfulness trains our mind to remain in the moment and therefore increases our attention span. Having a daily routine of mindfulness practice is an effective way to slow down the mind and retain its

focus. However, mindfulness is not only about doing an exercise for a few minutes a day. It is about staying mindful moment by moment as we go through our day. Every moment that you have mindful attention and focus counts. The positive effect of all the micro-doses of mindfulness adds up to strengthening your attention muscles.

If you have tried before to be mindful moment by moment during the day, you have probably noticed that it is not easy to remember to be mindful because an untrained mind tends to wander. Here is where mindful distraction comes in to use the distractions as positive support. We can use the distraction to remind us to be mindful.

Here is how to practise the mindful distraction technique:

Whenever you hear a notification sound from your digital devices, before you reach out to check what the sound was for, pause for a moment and take one mindful breath; take a deep breath with full attention. For one moment, disconnect from all your activity and the digital world and connect with yourself and be fully present with your breath. For one inhale and one exhale, be with your breath completely, as if the whole world disappears for you and at that moment, only you and your breath exist.

These small doses of mindfulness gives rest to your mind and relaxes your body. Research is increasingly showing the enormous benefits of mindfulness for our well-being, performance, and experience of life. Mindfulness reshapes your brain to increase focus and improve cognitive function. It enhances creativity, memory, and decision-making ability. Mindfulness also strengthens the immune



Distractions can also be seen as an opportunity to practice mindfulness

system and improves sleep. In addition, it decreases stress and anxiety.

We must cultivate the ability to focus to distract-proof our mind. The more we face distraction, the more we need to train our mindfulness muscles. And with mindful distraction, the more we face distraction, the more we have a trigger to remind us to be mindful.

Considering that adults are checking their phones 52-80 times a day and this number is increasing over the years, you can easily create the habit of being mindful this many times a

day and enjoy the many benefits of mindfulness if you practise mindful distraction. And it is a great achievement if you become mindful for one breath, 52-80 times a day.

In this digital world of distraction where all the ads and apps demand our attention, the best gift we can give ourselves is to regain our attention, and mindful distraction is the simplest way to do that.

Using the mindful distraction technique is a unique solution for today's disrupted life.



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We welcome your comments and suggestions on this article.
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