



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

CRISIS AND TRAUMA

Trauma-Informed Yoga and Meditation

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness can be described as paying attention to the present moment in a non-judgmental way. Studies show that by being present:

- We live in the present moment instead of focusing on thoughts, feelings, external events or interactions with others that happened in the past or may happen in the future.
- We are able to have a choice over how we respond to our day-to-day lives instead of remaining on auto-pilot.
- Feelings of acceptance are enhanced.

YOGA AND MINDFULNESS AS A THERAPY FOR TRAUMA

In yoga, the key concepts of mindfulness are the basis of movement. Yoga is focused on the present moment and can help reduce worries and stress. While practising yoga, we observe our thoughts and focus on the breath, which continuously brings our attention back to what is happening in the present moment. Yoga involves gentle postures, breath work, and meditation. It invites you to focus on your experiences and personal choices.

When a person has experienced trauma sometimes the body is not a safe place. When this occurs, we may experience hypervigilance and this may lead to fight/flight/freeze responses. By doing yoga and inviting choices about how to move the body, we can learn that the body is a safe place to be and, in turn, reduce the fight/flight/freeze response.

Trauma-sensitive yoga facilitators do not tell people how to feel or what to do. Every potential body movement is an invitation and a choice.



Studies show that yoga has many benefits:

- Improves physical, emotional, and mental health
- Reduces symptoms of depression, anxiety and PTSD
- Improves coping skills, stress management and overall quality of life
- Increases a sense of self-empowerment, self-acceptance, and self-care

Learn more about online trauma-informed yoga programs:

<https://www.yogaoutreach.com/>

BODY SCAN MEDITATION

Because we are all unique, certain wellness tools work better for some of us than others. Some people like to do body scans to help them reconnect and regulate. This tool may work for you – or it may not. Give it a try and see what you think. Remember only to do what feels safe and comfortable for you. You can stop at any time if it doesn't feel okay.

Sensations might include buzzing, tingling, pressure, tightness or anything else you notice. What if you don't notice any strong sensations or if things feel neutral? You are invited to simply notice that, too. There are no right answers. Just tune in to what's happening, as best you can, without judgment.

You are invited to be curious and open to what you are noticing, investigating the sensations as fully as possible, and then intentionally releasing the focus of attention before shifting to the next area to explore.

At some point, you may find it hard to concentrate. You may discover that you can't stop your attention from wandering. When this happens you are invited to come back to the sensation of breathing or focusing on the body. You can use as much time as you like for a body scan. Some people prefer 30-40 minutes while others may prefer five minutes.



DOING THE BODY SCAN

1. Get into a comfortable position. Some people prefer to sit on a chair or on the floor, while others prefer to lie down.
2. You may close your eyes, as it can be helpful to allow you to focus. Or, if you'd rather, you can always lower and half-close your eyes.
3. You may choose to bring your attention to your breath. You are invited, if comfortable, to place a hand above your heart and a hand on your belly.
4. As you breathe in you may choose to notice the feeling of air going in through your nose and filling up the lungs. You may notice the belly rising as you breathe in.
5. You may feel the chest expanding and rising as you breathe in. As you breathe out, the belly goes down and the chest goes down.
6. You are invited to allow as much time as you need or want to experience and investigate each area of the body.

7. When you're ready, knowing there is no hurry, you are invited to breathe in and perhaps imagine that you are bringing your inhale all the way from your nose to fill up your feet with air.
8. As you exhale, envision the air being slowly released from the feet, allowing them to be heavier and melt into the floor.
9. You are invited to use this method with other parts of the body such as legs, hands, arms, torso and head. Slowly breathe in through the nose or mouth and out through the nose or mouth.
10. Once you have brought your awareness throughout your body as much as you would like, you are invited to come back to the feeling of the breath in your chest and belly. You are invited to bring your focus here.
11. Whenever you are ready you are invited to send some gratitude to yourself for trying something new or for taking some time out of your day to focus on yourself.
12. You are invited to roll out the ankles and the wrists. If you like, you can shake out the hands.
13. In your own time you may choose to open your eyes if they are closed.

MINDFUL WALKS

A mindful walk can help calm or clear the mind. It can help you live in the present moment.

If you think this is something that could work for you, consider incorporating mindful walking into your life. Try using all of your senses – seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching – to bring awareness to your body and surroundings.



A GUIDE TO TAKING A MINDFUL WALK

As you walk, notice the feeling under your feet on the ground. Try feeling all the small movements your body has to make to lift your leg off the ground for each step. Notice how your legs, feet and arms feel with each step you take. If you become lost in thought, that is completely fine. As you continue to walk, you could use the next step as an opportunity to bring a pause to the thoughts - to bring some space to the mind.

If you choose to, use your sense of sight. Is the sun shining? If so, where is it shining? Is it reflecting off the water or puddles? Perhaps notice a tree and then maybe a branch and, even smaller still, a leaf. What intricacies are on the leaf? Are you able to notice the veins in the leaf?

Using your sense of smell, notice any aromas or scents. Are you able to notice any tastes as you walk? Can you taste the air? Now using your sense of touch, notice the solidity of the earth beneath your feet.

If it works for you, you can bring mindful walking anywhere. Use it on trail hikes around your community or when walking to a neighbour's house, the local school or to the grocery store.