

## How Mindfulness Can Help

*Written by Dr. Erin Hendriks, M.D.*

When faced with any big change in life, there's a mental rewiring that takes place. Health is one piece that makes up our complex identities as individuals, and it's not always easy to integrate a new piece of information into how we think about who we are.

In the process of rewiring pieces of your identity and adjusting to new lifestyle routines, you may find that some unhelpful or painful thoughts or emotions arise. This is a common experience for folks who are coming to terms with a new diagnosis such as MASLD or MASH.

Knowing it's common only goes so far though—more than the validation that painful thoughts or emotions are common, you may need support and tools to help you let go of those thoughts and emotions. That's where mindfulness comes in.

### What is mindfulness exactly?

Mindfulness is a skill we all possess: **the ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us.**

Said another way: "Mindfulness is the awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally." - Jon Kabat-Zinn

While mindfulness is in our capability as humans, it's more readily available to us when we practice it on a daily basis.

As you practice, you may notice that **you become more comfortable with being uncomfortable**, which means that you're better equipped to deal with your emotions and the stressors that cause them. When you can sit with these hard feelings, you'll have more choices about how you want to face the problem because you won't go straight for the impulsive or automatic response.

### How can you practice mindfulness?

Meditation and grounding exercises are examples of tools that help us tap into a mindful state of being. At first, meditation can feel really difficult. The mind's job is to think, and you may notice a constant inner dialogue of thoughts even as you try to quiet the mind.

But the goal of mindfulness isn't necessarily to quiet the mind—the goal is to be *present, aware, and unreactive*. In that way, you might say that **even noticing a stream of thoughts during a meditation is a success.**

When you take the time to observe your thoughts and feelings, you'll start to see that sitting with them rather than resisting them is what allows you to release them, like watching leaves float down a stream. You'll also see that most of the time, nothing horrible comes from being uncomfortable. You have a great capacity to handle difficult feelings and thoughts, and your ability to let them pass and move on can be strengthened with practice.

**Anything that helps you become more present, aware, and unreactive is a step toward greater mindfulness.**