

WORKING THROUGH COMMON CHALLENGES (PART 1)

It is completely okay, normal, and common to experience the challenges listed below. These challenges are NOT “bad” or “wrong” in any way. These challenges are simply part of the process. You CAN work through these challenges and stick with your practice. Here are some tips for working through the different types of challenges that come up.

“My mind won’t stop wandering.” It is totally normal and common to experience a wandering mind and have lots of thoughts come up during mindfulness practice. That is just what the mind does; it wanders. You don’t need to stop thoughts or push them away. Do your best to just notice what your experience is with a sense of curiosity and nonjudgment (“Oh look at that, there my mind goes again”). Sometimes thoughts can be “racing” or “intrusive” to the point it is very distressing. In these moments, see what it’s like to bring a sense of acceptance and kindness to your experience (“Hmm, what would it be like to just notice these thoughts and let them be, instead of fighting them or criticizing myself?”).

“I feel restless and can’t sit still.” It is common and totally okay to feel restless while practicing. This can be a physical restlessness and/or a mental restlessness. See what it’s like to notice the restlessness with a sense of curiosity (“Hmm, what does this actually feel like?”), rather than judging yourself or trying to force the restlessness to go away. You can also mix in mindful walking and mindful movement into your practice, instead of only practices where you sit still.

“I feel sleepy or fall asleep when I practice.” It’s okay if you fall asleep. No worries! Getting sleepy is more likely to happen when lying down. Try practicing sitting upright instead, or practicing with your eyes open or half open (softly gazing downwards in front of you).

WORKING THROUGH COMMON CHALLENGES (PART 2)

“I can’t do this” or “I’m not doing it right.” It is totally normal to have thoughts like this where we start to doubt ourselves and our ability to practice mindfulness. Try to gently acknowledge these thoughts with a sense of curiosity and kindness. (“Oh, look at that, there’s that doubt coming up again”). Keep in mind that there is no such thing as doing a practice “right” or “wrong.” There is simply doing a practice and seeing what comes up for you. If your mind wanders a lot or you have difficulty focusing, that is totally okay and normal.

“I don’t feel any better. What’s wrong with me?” When we practice, it is common to feel a desire to feel better or to judge ourselves for how we feel. See if you can pause and acknowledge that desire to feel different (“Oh wow, look at that, I am putting pressure on myself to feel different than how I feel”). See what it’s like to give yourself permission to just feel the way you are feeling in the moment. Mindfulness practice involves bringing a sense of acceptance towards our experience, instead of pressuring ourselves to feel better or different.

“I keep forgetting to practice.” It is completely normal and okay to forget to practice and to have times when you are busy or get sidetracked from your practice. This happens to all us. Even if you have missed several days or weeks of practice, you can always get back on track at any time and start practicing again. The key is to commit to regular practice for the long-run and to keep coming back to your practice again and again. Remember that you don’t need to take huge chunks out of your day to practice mindfulness. Just 5 or 10 minutes of practice a day, goes a long way! Doing little bits of practice each day is like giving your brain a little “recharge” each day, which keep your brain strong and healthy. You can also set an “alarm” on your smartphone to remind you to practice.