

6 mindfulness  
exercises you  
can do while  
waiting for a  
red light



Which one will change your life?

by Shaya Kass, PhD

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***To my wife, Tova, who keeps me honest  
with myself.***

First things first.

If all you want is the exercises, they are here on this page. Choose one or two and practice. Or choose all 6! If you want an explanation and the science behind them, keep on reading. If you want more help with staying mindful all day, send me an email or give me a call. (Info later on)

## **1**

While breathing in, count to four, hold your breath for a count of four, exhale while counting to four, again hold your breath for four.

## **2**

Be grateful. Express gratitude for the car or bus you are in, your wonderful family, the breakfast that you ate, or anything else. For example, I am so happy and grateful that I have a few seconds to be mindful.

## **3**

Be in awe. Think about the car you are in or the car passing while you wait to walk. All the thousands of parts that work together to make it work. The hundreds of people who built it.

## **4**

Do a body scan. Starting with your feet, scan each part of your body all the way to the crown of your head for any sensation you might feel. The rub of clothes. Tingly. Cool. Just pay attention to whatever you are feeling.

## **5**

Practice loving-kindness. Picture someone in your mind and say to them, "May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you find love, may you live with ease."

## **6**

Practice Distancing. Think of a problem that is bothering you today. What might your future self of next month say to you about today's problem?

***More bonus exercises at the end***

If you know someone who might benefit from these exercises, be a good friend and share! Send them to

<https://MindfulAboutLife.com/6exercises>

## About the author

I am Dr. Shaya Kass. I have been helping students and clients like you for over 30 years. I know mindfulness helps because I have seen it help me, my clients and my students. Also, I have read the science. It works.

I also know that many people don't have the time to sit for a 20-minute meditation. So, here you have 20 second meditations.

Enjoy!

## Disclaimer

All of the information in this document is meant to be for educational purposes only. If you have any maladies, physical or psychological, you should seek professional care. If you are already under the care of a professional and information here seems to help you, please discuss it with your health care professional.

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## ***Why bother?***

Why bother spending time practicing mindfulness? I will give you examples from the two populations I work with the most.

Imagine you are running your own small business and any time you are on the phone with a potential customer you have a thousand thoughts running around your head. You lose a lot of sales because you have a hard time being clear and convincing. What if you could lessen those thoughts and have clearer thinking? And make more sales?!

Imagine you are a student taking an exam. You studied and know the material but when you sit down for the exam you have all these worries that you are going to fail and you can't concentrate. What if you could push those thoughts away and ace the exam?!

What if you could be more in touch with your kids when you are with them?

What if you could pay better attention to the people who work for you when you meet with them?

Mindfulness has two parts. 1 – Watching your thoughts. 2 – Choosing your thoughts.

Try it.

# 1

While breathing in, count to four, hold your breath for a count of four, exhale while counting to four, again hold your breath for four.

This is often called “box breathing” or “4X4 breathing”. There is a good review of this technique by George Ryan in Police magazine.

Ryan, G. (2017, January 4). Box Breathing. Police. Retrieved from <https://www.policemag.com/training/article/15346596/box-breathing>

## 2

Be grateful. Express gratitude for the car or bus you are in, your wonderful family, the breakfast that you ate, or anything else. For example, I am so happy and grateful that I have a few seconds to be mindful.

In 2016 Don Davis and many others conducted a meta-analysis, an analysis of other research analyses, and found that practicing gratitude increases psychological well-being.

Davis, D. E., Choe, E., Meyers, J., Wade, N., Varjas, K., Gifford, A., ... & Worthington Jr, E. L. (2016). Thankful for the little things: A meta-analysis of gratitude interventions. *Journal of counseling psychology*, 63(1), 20.

### 3

Be in awe. Think about the car you are in or the car passing while you wait to walk. All the thousands of parts that work together to make it work. The hundreds of people who built it.

Or be in awe of your body and the many parts and systems that work together to allow you to be reading this.

There are quite a few articles showing that awe enhances well-being. Jeff Thompson did research about “Awe Narratives” where you tell a whole story. I suggest something much smaller here.

Thompson, J. (2022). Awe narratives: A mindfulness practice to enhance resilience and wellbeing. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 1645.

## 4

Do a body scan. Starting with your feet, scan each part of your body all the way to the crown of your head for any sensation you might feel. The rub of clothes. Tingly. Cool. Just pay attention to whatever you are feeling.

David Call and others did a study where students did a 45-minute body scan that is part of a larger program. If you are waiting at a red light for 45 minutes you have a problem. 😊  
While the students in Call's study had a large reduction in stress and anxiety, you can expect a much smaller reduction. But a little is better than nothing!

Call, D., Miron, L., & Orcutt, H. (2014). Effectiveness of brief mindfulness techniques in reducing symptoms of anxiety and stress. *Mindfulness*, 5, 658-668.

## 5

Practice loving-kindness. Picture someone in your mind and say to them, “May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you find love, may you live with ease.”

Xianglong Zeng and others did a meta-analysis of 24 studies of loving-kindness meditations and found that practicing loving-kindness enhances positive emotion.

Zeng, X., Chiu, C. P., Wang, R., Oei, T. P., & Leung, F. Y. (2015). The effect of loving-kindness meditation on positive emotions: a meta-analytic review. *Frontiers in psychology*, 6, 1693.

## 6

Practice Distancing. Think of a problem that is bothering you today. What might your future self of next month say to you about today's problem?

Tina Christin Antonsen Storeide and Amanda Aasen wrote a master's thesis about using a self-distancing technique and how it helped people to process information better. And Özlem Ayduk and Ethan Kross showed that self-distancing leads to more adaptive thinking and less rumination.

Ayduk, Ö., & Kross, E. (2010). Analyzing negative experiences without ruminating: The role of self-distancing in enabling adaptive self-reflection. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 4(10), 841-854.

Storeide, T. C. A., & Aasen, A. (2022). Emotion Regulation via Self-distancing and Information Processing (Master's thesis, Handelshøyskolen BI).