



**W**e often find ourselves overwhelmed by life's stresses. Let's face it. Life is tough, we must learn to adapt and survive constantly. Our mind is inundated with information, news and decision-making. We force ourselves to subdue our emotions and bottle them up creating a physiological environment that is ripe for disease. Our urban disconnect from nature makes it even tougher to deal with these issues. We develop unhealthy coping mechanisms like binge eating, smoking, shopping, substance abuse, violent behavior and so many others, which we don't consciously recognize until they show up as health disorders, huge credit card bills or injury. As overwhelmed as we may be, we manage to survive. Humans are built tough and we have a phenomenal capacity to crunch stress. But just like any mechanism, we need to rest, recover and reorganize. Mindfulness is the process of shining the light of our awareness internally so that we may reconnect with all our ability and potential. Mindfulness is the first step in taking control of our lives and breaking the chains of unhealthy habits. It is a simple act of observing the world around us and inside us. Simply put, mindfulness is the ability to delay your reaction long enough for you to contemplate and respond. It is the difference between an impulsive action vs. a well considered response. So the next time you feel an impulse to act angrily or a craving to eat unhealthy or to pick up a cigarette, try to delay that action by a few seconds. Allow yourself a moment to think, "Is my reaction necessary? Have I thought it through?" At the end of that you will have your response ready rather than a regrettable reaction. And all it takes to create this space between reaction and response is one breath. Take a deep inhale and let it out with a powerful exhale. Try it right now. One breath is all it takes to ground you to your inner peace and calm everything down. It gives your mind a chance to access it's intelligence rather than relying on animalistic instinct. You may end up eating that candy bar or lighting another cigarette or buying that shirt you don't need, but this time you did it with your mind involved. And that is what mindfulness is about. It is the act of involving the conscious mind in all our actions. Once we do that, we begin to understand what drives those actions. Once we understand them we can engage with them on a conscious level and once that happens our conscious mind becomes an active controller and decision maker. So here are some simple tips on how to improve your mindfulness.

- Sit in a comfortable place and observe your thoughts. Try not to move from your position for at least 5 minutes.
- Every time you feel agitated, take a deep breath and follow the breath as it goes in to your body and comes back out.
- If you can go 5 minutes without moving, increase the time you spend in this mindful meditation by another minute. If you couldn't do 5 minutes, it's ok. Try again the next time.
- Do this ritual once a day at least, best before bed-time.



## SINCE YOU ASKED...

Something troubling your mind? Need some professional guidance? Weekender has collaborated with the finest specialists in town, who shall help in answering your doubts and queries, ranging from relationships to anxiety, trauma, career, health and a whole bunch more. Send your question to [editor@weekender.bh](mailto:editor@weekender.bh) (Pseudonym can be used) and our expert will get back to you with the best approach to your problem.



## I am going to remove my happy face now!

Hello,

I have been following your column for a long time as it helps me a lot in gaining perspective. I have been meaning to write to you for a while as well. With an extremely lifestyle that involves 3 kids, a full-time job and lots of household work, I get anxiety attacks. I try to keep it all together in front of my family but when I'm on my own, I feel like I could scream and just want to run off somewhere and be in my own little bubble. Please help me on how to remain calm and not freak out. Is it too overwhelming, or am I overreacting?

Janine A.

Dear Janine,

Having so many responsibilities in daily life can be really challenging and absolutely exhausting. No wonder you feel so overwhelmed. Raising children, playing with them, helping with homework, attending their needs is already a job. And you have another one that probably also requires lots of effort and energy. When back at home you'd probably like to enter a clean house and find hot dinner on the table (at least from time to time). What I can only assume is that like most of women I know, you are trying to do everything at your very best. Unfortunately, this is the quickest way to emotional burnout and all sorts of emotional disorders.

I think it's high time for a change. What you should do in first place is to reorganise your lifestyle. You didn't mention anything about your husband: is he involved in looking after the house and kids? They are also his, aren't they? If you both earn money, it is only fair if you share other responsibilities as well. There is nothing wrong in asking for help. That could be also a friend, a neighbour, a relative (perhaps your kids could also do some simple chores?). We tend to underestimate people's willingness to support others.

If that's absolutely not an option, maybe you could hire someone to do the household work? Mention it to your husband. There is a chance that since you never complained throughout all these years, he doesn't even know how tired you are. Looking at the wife as a superwoman can be very convenient. But we are only humans, so maybe it's time you opened his eyes. Just imagine, when you are at work, someone else could clean the house, cook a meal and do some ironing. This way you could get some rest and have more energy for the family. Not to mention less stress and definitely better emotional balance.

The second phase of your 'assignment' should be contacting a specialist. You mentioned anxiety attacks which are a clear manifestation of some negative changes in your mind. Anxiety attacks usually are not triggered by any actual factor or a situation, can happen unexpectedly, but they cause intense physiological symptoms like pounding heart, quick pulse, sweating, dizziness, feeling of choking or/ and chest pains. Fear of death is quite common as well. Sometimes such state can last several minutes, but can also be as long as a few hours. If the attacks tend to repeat, as a result patients might be extremely worried in anticipation for another one. A psychologist should help in identifying the sources of emotional instability and guide on how to react when the first symptoms of attack are noticed. In more severe cases, pharmaceutical treatment may be required and then it's necessary to visit a psychiatrist.

Here I'd like to remind that there is absolutely nothing embarrassing in caring about our mental health. We normally don't have a problem to see a general physician and people should feel equally comfortable going to a psychologist or a psychiatrist. In the end it's all about health (and it's priceless, isn't it?).

Janine, I hope you'll manage to reduce the workload and get some rest. When was the last time you went on holiday? If you don't introduce these changes to your routine, you'll be getting more and more tired, stressed and overwhelmed. I'm sure your kids and husband would appreciate having a happy and relaxed lady around, therefore they should help you achieve that state. Good luck!



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