

## Being Aware (Mindful) of Your Distressing Thoughts

When you are prone to anxiety or panic attacks, just thinking about something can make you upset and cause your body to react. Your thoughts can trigger a fear response in your body, like a tightness in your chest, or shallow breathing, which then triggers even more anxiety. Sometimes, this can result in a full-blown panic attack and you can even feel like you are having a heart-attack. All this can start with just a simple thought.

This mindfulness exercise is designed to help you be aware of upsetting thoughts, without letting them trigger a physical anxiety response in your body.

Being mindful means acknowledging your thoughts and feelings without responding to them in a typical negative way. Mindfulness is a technique that increases your awareness of the present moment while being non-judgmental. Being non-judgmental is the key, and that's what we're going to work on with this exercise.

Begin by sitting in a comfortable chair. Now, read the unpleasant phrases below and pick one to visualize. Take your time (at least five minutes) visualizing the image and use all the appropriate senses. Experience the sounds and the smells you associate with this image and the taste and touch if appropriate.

Even though the images these phrases provoke may be repellant, don't judge them. See if you can be aware of them without any negative reaction.

1. A person vomiting on you
2. Opening a door and finding a dead animal in the room
3. Looking at an open, oozing sore
4. Sitting in a dark cave with insects crawling around you

Can you think of other images which would be repellant to you?

5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_

Practice this mindful technique with two more phrases for five minutes each. Rate how you did with each image, using the scale: 1 = "I didn't respond to the image at all" and 7 = "I was completely disgusted by the image."

Now, write down one situation that normally causes you to be very anxious and upset:

\_\_\_\_\_

Practice this same exercise, thinking about this situation in a mindful and non-judgmental manner, at least once a day for at least seven days. Use the next page to record your progress.

