

Getting present

When we talk about getting present we mean using the five senses to bring awareness to the present moment rather than being 'lost in thinking'. As we all know, our mind is whirring away in the background, often with little awareness and the content of our thinking can really affect how we feel. One thought automatically tends to lead to another and our minds can take us to some really bleak or anxious places. It is at these times that it may be helpful to 'get present'. Being present also opens up the joyful, the uplifting and the things in life that make us feel vital and connected. And finally, the only place we can ever take action is in the present. Being present helps us to take more effective action based on what is actually happening *right now*, rather than what our thinking minds might be remembering or predicting.

Noticing

The first step in getting present is to **notice** that we have become lost in thinking so that we have the opportunity to make a choice about what to do next. We might begin to notice that we have become lost in thought when we feel our mood dip or we begin to feel dissatisfied, or anxious in some way. We might also simply notice that we have been thinking a lot about our problems, circumstances that we are not able to change and we are going around in circles.

Using our five senses

We can actively use our five senses to get present so that we are able to step away from thinking and re-focus our efforts on whatever it is we are doing.

We can use our five senses to get present in any activity although sometimes some senses will be more helpful to use than others depending upon the situation and what you are doing. It is touch, seeing and hearing that are most often used to get present.

The five senses are:

- Smell
- Taste
- Touch
- Hear
- See

Stay curious about your experience of getting present and as best as you can be playful when you begin to explore this new way of being in your life!

Bringing our minds back

You'll notice that your mind keeps wandering off as you try to get present. This is what minds do and is nothing to worry about; everybody's mind is the same in this respect. Just gently re-focus yourself on whatever sense it is that you are using. This is all part of the experience!

Getting present: using the sense of touch

You can try this now! Read through this and then have a go. As best you can, feel into' (rather than think about) the sensations of sitting (or lying if you happen to be lying down). Feel your feet flat on

the floor, your bottom on the seat of the surface that is supporting you and your hands resting in your lap or on your legs. See if it is possible to notice any tingling, buzzing, sense of aliveness in those parts of the body, any sense of coolness or warmth and any sense of weight as your body rests wherever it is that you are sitting. You can try this in other places. You could sit outside and feel the sun or rain or wind on your face, the grass on bare skin, and lots of other sensations coming from the skin.

Getting present: using the sense of sight

We can use sight whenever it is light enough to see. We can notice light and shade, movement, stillness, shapes, textures, tones and colours. You're probably already pretty familiar with using sight to get present although you may not have thought about it in this way before. A walk in the park or just walking along a street can become a different experience when we pay attention in this way rather than being lost in thinking.

Getting present: using hearing

Noticing the sounds around you can be very interesting. Here you can focus on loud/quiet, tone and pitch (high/low), and just the different quality of sounds. You can notice, for example, the difference between birdsong and a heavy skip lorry rumbling by. Notice how sometimes there are 'layers' of sound, and how sounds emerge from the quietness and then as they subside, fall away from awareness.

Activities to do to practice getting present:

Showering is a good one. There is a lot to feel, see, and smell.

Washing up. Feel the warmth of the water, look at the appearance of the bubbles in the washing up liquid and the dishes, at first dirty and then clean. Feel the weight of the dishes and pans in your hands and the movements of your body as it coordinates your movement to clear the dishes, place them in the water and then take them out.

Peeling vegetables. Notice the colours and feel the textures, shapes and weight of the vegetables as you hold them in your hands. Notice the change in the colour as you peel and the different aromas of the vegetables.

Stroking the dog/cat. Look closely. Feel the texture of the fur, look at the colour and the way that the light changes the colour of the fur. Feel the warmth of the dog/cat as you stroke. Can you feel their heartbeat? Look at the expression on their face.

And last but not least. Being present with people who are important to you in your life. Try using all of the senses for this.