

Mindful Coloring

A Simple & Fun Way to Reduce the Stress in Your Life



Introduction by Lawrence E. Shapiro, Ph.D.

Adult coloring books have become very popular over the last few years, reminding us of the need for simple activities to help us step back from the day-to-day bombardment of media and technology. I've heard some people say that spending time coloring a design is just the kind of "mindless" activity they need at the end of the day and that adult coloring books are a good distraction from the constant commotion in their household.

But I'd like you to think about using this coloring book in a somewhat different way. Rather than coloring as a "mindless" distraction, I'd like you to be "mindful" while you are coloring. Mindful coloring can be a very powerful type of meditation which has a surprising number of short and long-term psychological benefits.

As you may know, mindfulness is a technique that Western psychology has borrowed from the Buddhist tradition of mindful meditation. Mindfulness involves bringing your attention to what is happening in the present moment, being aware of both your internal experiences as well as what you experience in the world around you. As you observe your internal and external experiences, you will try not to judge them as good or bad, and you will try not to react to them. Just be aware and present in the moment.

Does this sound simple? It actually might be a little harder than you think. But I assure you it is well worth the effort. Many psychological studies have shown that there are measurable health benefits when you practice mindfulness on a regular basis. These include boosting the immune system, improving memory and attention skills, fostering compassion, and overcoming disorders like anxiety and depression.

So here's what you should do:

- Set aside 5 to 15 minutes to practice mindful coloring.
- Find a time and place where you will not be interrupted.
- Gather your materials to do your coloring and sit comfortably at a table. You may want to set a timer for 5 to 15 minutes. You should try and continue your mindful practice until the alarm goes off.
- Choose any design you like and begin coloring wherever you like.
- As you color, start paying attention to your breathing. You will probably find that your breathing is becoming slower and deeper, but you don't have to *try* and relax. In fact, you don't have to try and do anything. Just pay attention to the design, to your choice of colors, and to the process of coloring.

While you are coloring, be aware of your inner and outer experiences without reacting to them. For example, if you start to think about something that upset you during the day, just be "mindful" of the feeling without reacting to it. Let your feelings come and go without really thinking about them. Similarly, if you hear music or a noise, or feel a breeze, or smell something cooking, just observe these experiences without reacting to them. The essence of mindful meditation is just to be present in the moment.

Mindful coloring is just one way to introduce you to the concept of mindfulness. Once you have learned the essence of mindful meditation you can bring this "skill" into all areas of your life. You can practice mindful eating and mindful walking or any other activity where you want to develop a greater sense of being alive by being present in the moment. If you are using mindfulness to address emotional problems, you should consider consulting a mental health professional who can help you integrate this practice into a comprehensive treatment plan.

















