

## 7 ways to live in the moment

For millennia, sages from the Buddha to Yogi Berra have been advising us to tame our wandering minds and focus our attention on the present. The reason is obvious: The past is history, the future nothing but a dream. All we really ever have is *now*.

Great advice, but not so easy to follow—especially in our hi-tech, device ridden world where the tools of distraction are multiplying like ants at a Fourth of July picnic. Here are seven strategies to help you smell the peonies, be present with your loved ones, and savor each moment of your day.

**Make it a priority.** As anyone who has ever sat down to meditate will tell you, the mind is a devilish, unruly beast prone to fretting over what happened yesterday and what *might* happen tomorrow. By deciding to focus on the present moment, you are taking the first step toward actually experiencing that moment. And, believe it or not, the instant you realize your mind has drifted (which it will, endlessly) is cause for celebration, and means that you're starting to pay attention.

**Avoid the M-word.** Multitasking. Nothing kills the moment (and possibly you) faster than texting and programming your GPS while driving down a highway. Less potentially lethal but equally insidious is Googling something online while talking on your Smartphone and setting a recording on your DVR—when you're supposed to be spending quality time with your partner. One thing at a time.

**Discover the sacred pause.** This can take many forms: meditation, yoga, prayer, a walk in the woods, even sitting on the front porch and observing the passing clouds. The Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh suggests stopping and taking a few deep breaths before answering a ringing telephone. How long you pause matters less than making the sacred pause a regular part of your life. As with strengthening any muscle, learning to live in the moment takes daily practice

**Tune into your body.** Taming the mind is only part of the equation. Every thought triggers a physical sensation, and our bodies can be our best teachers—if we pay attention. The knot that arises in your stomach when you consider changing jobs or spending more than you can afford on a summer vacation is telling you something important. So is the warmth that spreads across your chest when you see a friend or play your favorite music. Listen.

**Do something out of the ordinary.** There's nothing like doing something new to capture your attention. Learn a foreign language. Travel someplace you've never been. Try your hands at pottery or your feet at tango. You don't even have to leave your house to shift your focus. D. H. Lawrence said, "I got the blues thinking of the future, so I left off and made some marmalade. It's amazing how it cheers one up to shred oranges and scrub the floor."

**Forget your to-do list.** Most of us, when we start to pay attention to the ramblings of our busy minds, are shocked to realize just how much time we waste constructing our to-do lists, then berating ourselves for not getting everything done. The secret here is to realize that your to-do list is infinite. You will never get to the end of it. Accepting this helps to free up energy so that instead of being trapped in a mental ten-car pileup, you can really taste the food on your plate, feel the afternoon sun on your face, and hear the birdsong at dawn.

**Be patient.** Though living in the moment may be the key to happiness, it takes time and ten thousand baby steps to begin to wrangle the often fearful, restless mind. Give yourself credit for practicing. As you become increasingly adept at opening to the present without trying to change it, you'll discover that whether the moment is difficult or joyful, it will pass in a flash—followed by the next moment and the next. As the poet Emily Dickinson wrote, "Forever is composed of nows."