

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy

A Guide to Understanding and Preventing Depressive Relapse

Why MBCT?

When depression returns more than once, the brain becomes more sensitive to low moods. Small dips in how you feel can quickly spiral into familiar patterns of negative thinking, withdrawal, and exhaustion. MBCT was designed specifically to help people who have experienced repeated episodes of depression. It teaches you to notice early warning signs and respond differently — with awareness rather than autopilot — so you can interrupt the cycle before it takes hold.

The Eight Core Steps

- 1 Awareness on Autopilot** — Recognizing how often we move through life without noticing our thoughts, feelings, or body sensations.
- 2 Living in Our Heads** — Understanding the difference between thinking about experience and directly experiencing the present moment.
- 3 Gathering the Scattered Mind** — Using mindful breathing to anchor attention in the here and now, building concentration gently.
- 4 Recognizing Aversion** — Noticing how we habitually push away unpleasant feelings — and how that struggle can make things worse.
- 5 Allowing and Letting Be** — Learning to stay present with difficult emotions without needing to fix or escape them.
- 6 Thoughts Are Not Facts** — Seeing negative thoughts as mental events rather than truths — "I'm worthless" becomes just a passing thought.
- 7 Self-Care as Prevention** — Identifying activities, routines, and connections that nourish you and building them into daily life.
- 8 Maintaining and Extending** — Creating a personal relapse prevention plan using the skills you've developed throughout the program.

Your Portable Tool: The Three-Minute Breathing Space

Minute 1: Notice what's happening right now — thoughts, feelings, body sensations.

Minute 2: Gently focus your full attention on the breath.

Minute 3: Expand awareness to the whole body and the space around you.

Recommended Reading

The Mindful Way Through Depression: Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness

by Mark Williams, John Teasdale, Zindel Segal, and Jon Kabat-Zinn

A practical guide written for readers (not clinicians) with guided audio meditations included.

This handout is for informational purposes and is not a substitute for professional guidance. Discuss with your therapist.