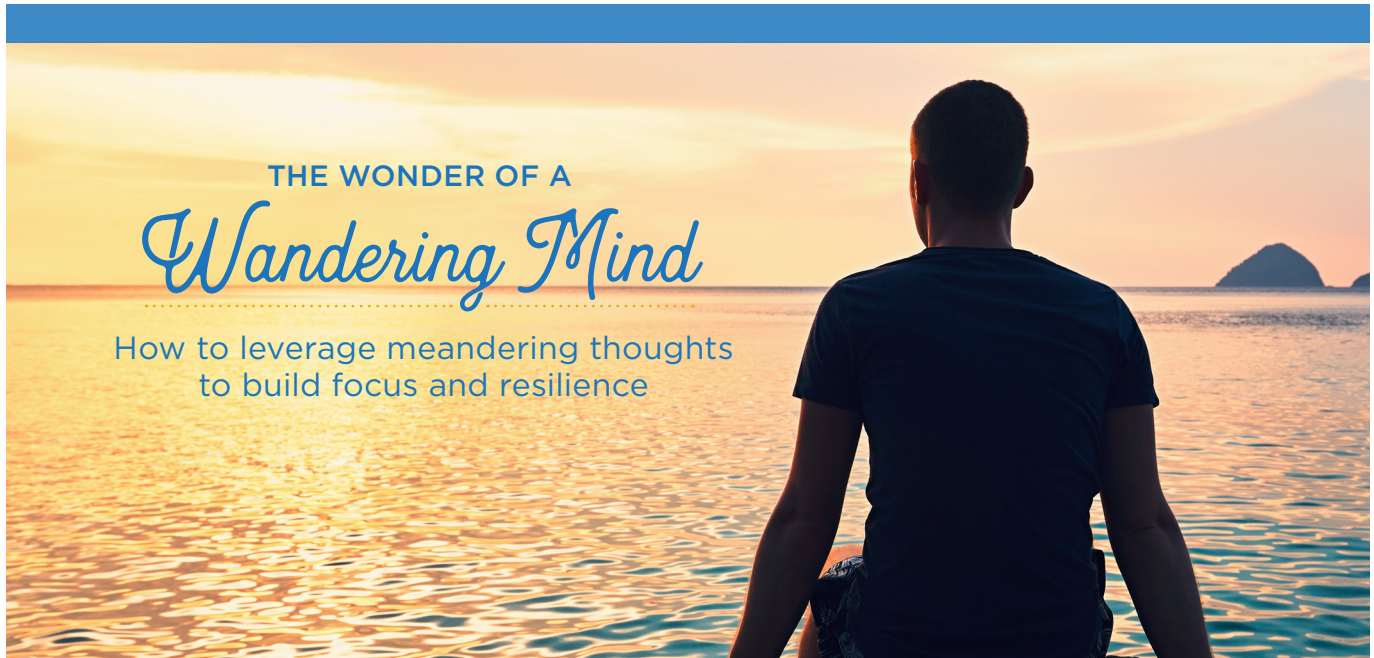




CONCERN:EAP

# Healthy & Resilient You



**Picture this.** You're sitting in a meeting (or class, or presentation), and despite your best intentions to pay attention, your thoughts have wandered off. You might

be thinking about what you'll have for dinner or making a mental list of all the work that's waiting for you back at your desk—all the things you might be doing instead of being where you are.

Then you realize that everyone is staring at you because you've just said, "Yeah! Falafel sounds great for dinner!" out loud. Or worse, that your boss/teacher/presenter has asked you a question that you didn't hear and now the whole room is waiting for your answer.

Ah, the joys of a wandering mind. We've all been there. A recent study following thousands of adults during daily activities found that forty-seven percent of the time, participants' minds weren't focused on what they were currently doing. The

study also found that people reported being less happy while their minds were wandering.

You'd think that the answer to this scenario would be to abolish attention-drift altogether, but there may be a different way to look at it. Maybe mind-wandering is there to help us strengthen our ability to focus.

Consider the breathing meditation, a common tool used to train focus. In this simple mindfulness practice, you sit quietly and focus your attention on your breathing. It seems easy at the start, but for most people, it doesn't take long before the mind forgets about the breath and starts to wander. When that happens, you gently reengage your attention, drawing it away from distraction and back to the sensation of inhaling and exhaling.

On the surface, it may look like the mind-wandering is a problem because it disrupts focused attention. But, what if the point isn't to keep your mind from wandering? What if it's to become more aware of it as it happens?



## Awareness and Drift

When attention drifts, like in our opening example of the meeting, it almost always happens without our noticing. One second we're listening to 4th quarter projections and the next thing we know, it's fifteen minutes later and we're fantasizing about falafel.

It's natural for the mind to wander down well-trod mental paths in this way. The goal of mindfulness isn't to stop it from happening. It's to train yourself to notice when it does. By being better aware of where your mind is focused at any given moment, you can more easily redirect it as needed.

### To help with training attention, you might try this simple breath awareness meditation.

1. Sit comfortably and close your eyes. Take a few moments to notice what's going on around you—sounds, physical sensations, thoughts, feelings—without reacting.
2. Now observe your breathing. Don't try to manipulate it in any way. Just breathe. Note the feeling of the air moving in and out of the nose, and the way your rib cage expands and contracts.
3. When your mind starts to wander, and it will, simply think to yourself, "my mind is wandering." Don't judge it or be frustrated. Remember, this is an important part of the meditation. Simply notice that you are no longer observing your breath and gently bring your focus back to the details of your breathing as you did in step 2.

You can practice this meditation for just a few minutes each day, or for longer if you're able.

Recent behavioral research shows that this type of meditation training improves memory and other executive brain functions. That's not surprising if you picture meditation like a gym exercise. You're building your mental focus muscle, and mind-wandering is the weight you add to the machine for more resistance. The more you "lift" and the more reps you do, the stronger your ability to redirect focus should become.



### Guiding wandering attention is a core strategy of mindfulness,

which is the practice of focusing awareness in the present moment. Mindfulness can help to relieve stress, boost concentration, alleviate worry, and has been shown to positively impact certain health conditions like high blood pressure and chronic pain.

Another awareness practice—emotional intelligence or EI—is the capacity to identify emotions and use that awareness to guide our decisions and behavior in a proactive vs. emotionally reactive way. Research has shown that individuals with higher EI quotients tend to be more successful at work, more resilient and generally more content in life.

Both Mindfulness and EI have many techniques in common. Individually and together, they're important tools that you can use to supercharge your resilience engine.

To help you unlock the power of these complementary resilience powerhouses, visit the [Mindfulness and Emotional Intelligence toolkit](#) in the Resilience Hub™. The toolkit includes multi-media content like short articles, fun quizzes, and entertaining videos all selected to help you explore the benefits of mindfulness and EI.

For even more ways to help cultivate mindfulness and resilience in 2018, visit the Resilience Hub™ at [www.ConcernResilienceHub.com](http://www.ConcernResilienceHub.com) regularly. First time users may be asked to enter their company ID.

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