**Mindful Listening For Stress Reduction**

The mind a story-telling machine - it loves overthink, plan, judge, critique and organize itself in unhelpful ways. To put simply, the mind is often its own greatest threat. Fortunately, we have the ability to train the mind, and we can learn how to feel more at ease and calmer through practicing mindfulness whilst listening to music.

“What is mindfulness?” You may be asking. Mindfulness is a liberating practice that allows us to be completely engaged in the present moment. It has been practiced for thousands of years and it’s about bringing attention, awareness and curiosity to all of the senses that are present in the here and now.

The way we are able to train mindfulness as a skill is to intentionally bring our focus to the present moment and to everything we experience. Mindfulness is a wonderful tool for everyone. In this article I will be sharing how we can listen to music with a mindful approach - using sound as an object of focus for the mind.

Both music and mindfulness offer incredible therapeutic potential, and the two individual practices are able to compliment one another. Practicing mindful listening is proven to boost our overall wellbeing and reduce stress. In fact, the [health benefits of mindfulness](https://www.helpguide.org/harvard/benefits-of-mindfulness.htm) are truly nothing short of extraordinary.

**How To Practice Mindful Listening**

When practicing mindful listening, I invite you to pay extra special attention to all the different sounds you can hear and all of the sensations you feel. Pay close attention to the contact of your body on the chair, and your feet on the floor, and notice what the breath feels like inside your lungs as you inhale and exhale.

Choose any piece of music to listen to. It can be a familiar song you enjoy or something entirely new. Take some deep breaths and feel yourself grounded in the chair or wherever you are sat.

Once you are ready, press play and simply absorb all the sounds through your headphones or speakers. Close your eyes and focus on all of the different aspects of the music as it unfolds.

**The Different Sounds To Explore**

There are so many new ways to explore music, and every song is completely different. Bringing a mindful approach to music can totally transform the experience and allow you to engage with the music in a more meaningful way. Here are some different ways you can bring a curious mind to the sounds in a piece of music.

**1.)** Try paying attention to the timbre of the different types of instruments you can hear. Imagine it’s the very first time you have ever heard a particular type of instrument. As the song develops listen to how the different instruments communicate with one another within the composition.

**2.)** Notice the dynamics of the song and the changing levels of intensity. Without judging or analyzing, familiarize yourself with the beat and how the music flows. Is it soft and balanced or more aggressive by nature? Rhythm plays a huge part in music and offers infectious energy to the listener.

**3.)** Now absorb the mood of the music. Is it bright and cheerful? Or does it perhaps have a more solemn tone? Notice if the song progressively builds up in tension and offers a climactic release. Perhaps there might be a key change. Does the song sound smooth and melodic or is there more harmonic dissonance?

**4.)** If the song has vocals, focus on the unique tone and the range of the singer. What sort of voice does he or she have? It could be softer or a more powerful voice. Try and pay attention to the tone, the emotion and the melodies expressed by the singer.

**Final Thoughts**

Mindfulness is about accepting what arises without judgment, and to rest in the present moment. Naturally you will become distracted by thoughts and feelings - but try not to resist them. If you find that you become distracted, then you can bring your attention back to the body, the breath and the sounds you experience. There is no need to make judgments or criticisms of the sounds that you hear.

We are surrounded by music. It is undeniable that it affects people’s moods and emotions. Being able to really tune into the music we listen to can enhance the experience and provide qualities of reassurance and calm.

The focus of mindfulness is much like a spotlight that we can gently guide our attention towards with a sense of curiosity and openness. There does not need to be much effort required – it’s a very light approach. I invite you to simply experience the sensations and sounds that arise.

Mindfulness can be learned by anyone; it’s just a skill that is trained and nurtured with time. Try not to have any expectations, but to simply enjoy allowing the present moment to unfold.

**Blurb**

Gideon Waxman is a London based drummer and music educator. He holds a bachelor of music degree from the University of Westminster and is fully qualified to teach mindfulness based stress reduction programs. You can find more of his advice at [Drum Helper](https://drumhelper.com/), which is a free online resource dedicated to helping drummers achieve more from their playing.