(CNN) — Are you feeling frazzled? That's relatable. These days, stress and anxiety are soaring across the globe.

If you have a minute to spare, you can tweak the course of your day with a quick mindfulness practice.

In recent years, studies have shown that mindfulness -- a group of practices designed to focus the mind on the here and now -- holds big promise for reducing pain, improving sleep, soothing stress, and helping with both anxiety and depression.

"Mindfulness is the practice of cultivating awareness of the present moment -- thoughts, emotions and body sensations -- without judging them or reacting to them," said Eric Garland, a distinguished professor and associate dean for research at the University of Utah College of Social Work.

Paying attention to the sensation of your breath is among the most fundamental of mindfulness practices, said Amishi Jha, professor of psychology at the University of Miami.

"You're going to shine the flashlight of attention on those breath-related sensations," she said. Jha calls such exercises "core strength training for our mind," or workouts to hone our ability to focus on the present.

You can get started right now. Ready? Here's how to begin.

1. Take a minute (or five). "Dedicate some time," Jha said. "It can be as short as a minute." Set a timer so you can focus on the practice at hand. If possible, try to minimize distractions. You can sit, stand or lie down. Choose whatever feels comfortable to you.

2. Anchor your attention. Pick one physical sensation of breathing to focus on, said Patricia Rockman, director of education and clinical services at the Centre for Mindfulness Studies in Toronto.

"This might be at the nostrils, the chest or the belly. It's really on the physical sensations, the movement of breath at a specific point," Rockman said.

That will be the "anchor" of your practice. Now, breathe normally while turning your attention to that place.


"People think they're crappy meditators because they have lots of thoughts," Rockman said. "They shouldn't be expecting their thoughts to go away or their mind to be empty."
When you notice your mind wandering, just turn your attention back to your anchor. It’s like doing mental reps. Each time you return your focus to the breath, it strengthens that cognitive "muscle."

4. **Repeat.** A minute of mindful breathing is just dipping your toe in, Jha said. It’s a starting point. Over time, you could work up to 10 or 15 minutes a day.

Even if you're doing regular mindfulness meditation, though, Jha encourages people to look for opportunities to sneak in "micro-practices" like this one.

"At a stop sign, waiting in line, waiting in the car to pick up your kid," she said. "You might pick up your phone and..."

5. **Make a plan.** If you hope mindfulness will be a habit that sticks, try making a specific plan to try again tomorrow, said Katy Milkman, a professor at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and the author of "How to Change: The Science of Getting from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be."

"Make it more of a firm commitment, so that it's not a vague intention we can keep procrastinating on," she said. That might mean penciling a few minutes for mindfulness into your calendar. Over time, daily mindfulness can turn into a new habit.

And if you miss a day or two, Milkman said it's key to avoid the "what-the-hell effect." That's what happens when we fall short of our goals and then give up altogether. Instead, she recommended giving yourself a limited weekly number of "emergency reserves" to use on days when even a mindful minute seems like too much to do.

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"Repetition builds habits," Milkman said. "But having this 'I'm not going to give up on myself' strategy is really important too."

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