

## Accepting Discomfort Could Help You Thrive

Equanimity, a key ingredient of mindfulness meditation, helps people face life's ups and downs

It's important to first define the idea of turning toward discomfort. I'm not advocating for people to put themselves in dangerous or excruciating positions. But when we push ourselves into challenging or discomfiting situations, much like trainers who push athletes just past their comfort zone to make gains, learning often happens. Indeed, a 2022 study involving more than 2,000 people [demonstrated that](#) the participants who were explicitly encouraged to push themselves into awkward, uncomfortable situations across multiple domains—including taking improv classes to boost self-confidence and reading about opposing political viewpoints—later reported the greatest degree of personal growth.

Another study, published in 2023, found that people who can face negative emotions such as sadness and anger in a neutral way [are more satisfied](#), are less anxious and have fewer symptoms of depression than those who judge their negative feelings harshly. That study aligns with [a growing consensus](#) in psychology that suggests we can learn powerful lessons about ourselves if we can sit with our emotions and thoughts with an open, curious mind.

My own research indicates that meditation provides an ideal way to practice turning toward discomfort—particularly when it improves one's equanimity.

“Equanimity” refers to a mental attitude of mental calmness, composure, and evenness of temper, especially in a difficult situation. In my laboratory at Carnegie Mellon University, we conducted several clinical trials on developing equanimity during mindfulness-meditation training.

To gauge the effectiveness of such interventions, we recruited 153 stressed adults in Pittsburgh and offered them a mindfulness-meditation training program with or without training in equanimity. For example, the mindfulness-only group built skills to recognize ongoing experiences, whereas the equanimity group practiced acceptance of those experiences in addition to the basic recognition. Our equanimity training group had much better outcomes on several measures.

In the days after training, people introduced to equanimity exercises reported significantly **higher positive emotions and well-being** throughout the day and more **meaningful social interactions** than participants who received mindfulness training without the equanimity component. It was as though developing an attitude of equanimity had transformed their emotional reactivity to stress, helping them better appreciate and savor daily life’s many little positive experiences and making them more curious and open to connecting with others.

Equanimity can help us weather the inevitable periods of suffering that we all face at some point in our life. But we can each build resilience on a personal level by cultivating greater acceptance of our experience—good or bad, painful or pleasant—in the present moment.