

## Automaticity: Why the health benefits of mindfulness are limited and why mindlessness is sometimes better

Although mindfulness has its merits, psychological research has also revealed that in some circumstances it's important to be mind/less. That is, as we develop skill in complex tasks, we can perform them with increasing facility until attention seems to be unnecessary. Everyday examples range from riding a bike to chopping cucumbers to brushing your teeth.

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In a classic study, cognitive scientist Sian Beilock and her colleagues had [skilled golfers attempt to sink putts](#) under different experimental conditions. In one scenario, the golfers were simply instructed to pay attention to the swing of their club and say "stop" when they finished their swing. In another condition, they were instructed to listen for a target sound while ignoring other noises and say the word "tone" when they heard the target sound.

Counterintuitively, the skilled golfers performed substantially *worse* when they focused on their swing than when they paid attention to irrelevant sounds. The effect of paying attention to their swing was so damaging that the golfers actually did better when they were warming up before the experiment began.

[This is an excerpt. Read the original post here.](#)