

Being Mindful in a Busy World



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What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is paying purposeful attention to the present moment. Mindfulness researcher Jon Kabat-Zinn says that mindfulness is "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment." (Zinn, 2003). Another researcher in the field, Ellen Langer, says "Mindfulness is the process of actively noticing new things, relinquishing preconceived mindsets, and then acting on the new observations." In other words, pay attention! Of course, it is more complicated than that, but it begins there. It also includes an openness to new ways of looking at things, and in Langer's definition, be willing to change based upon the new perceptions.

"The best way to capture moments is to pay attention. This is how we cultivate mindfulness. Mindfulness means being awake. It means knowing what you are doing."

-Jon Kabat-Zinn

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

Kabat-Zinn is called the father of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). He developed this program back in 1979 at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center with the focus of helping patients cope with chronic pain. His idea

was to teach patients mindfulness meditation techniques to refocus their attention to change their response to pain and reduce their overall suffering. Zinn wanted to focus on what is now called the biopsychosocial model of illness, meaning that we look at physical, psychological, and social elements, not just biological causes. Consider the influence of this way of thinking – it seems obvious now that our minds and our social connections are related to how we feel physically and how we heal, but that has not always been the case. Zinn's program has been so successful that there are currently 1000 certified MBSR instructors teaching these techniques in almost every state and more than 30 countries. Also, more than 20,000 people have completed the MBSR 8-week program.

Benefits of Mindfulness Practice

Generally speaking, being mindful can:

- Give people more appreciation for life
- Assist with focus and attention
- Assist people in handling emotions
- Combat multitasking

"Distraction wastes our energy; concentration restores it."

-Sharon Salzberg

Research shows that practicing mindfulness can:

- Reduce stress levels
- Improve working memory, emotional regulation, and well-being
- Enhance coping with distress and disability
- Reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, substance abuse, eating disorders, and chronic pain
- Lower cortisol levels and blood pressure
- Increase immune response
- Decrease mind-wandering



How long before you see benefits?

Research has shown that the benefits of mindfulness can be seen in as little as a 15-minute session.

*"Mindfulness isn't difficult; we just need to remember to do it."
-Sharon Salzberg*

Mindfulness Techniques

There are several ways to practice mindfulness. Since being mindful is the act of focusing on and experiencing the present, this can be applied to just about anything you do in life. If you need a little guidance at first, several types of scripts are available on the internet for everything from paying attention to smell to sounds, when you walk, and even washing dishes!

Adaptations for Older Adults

Mindfulness meditation has been proven to be beneficial for people of all ages, but some researchers recognize the need for adaptations for certain populations.

A few suggestions for older adults who want to practice mindfulness meditation include:

- Practice meditation by sitting on a chair or lying on the couch/bed. Sitting on the floor can be uncomfortable for older adults, and they may have difficulty getting up from a sitting or lying position.
- Those with hearing loss should sit close to the instructor or face them to read their lips.
- Balancing poses should be done near a wall or behind a chair for support.
- Walking meditation should be done using a regular pace since slower than usual speeds contributed to a loss of balance. A wall or other aid may also be used to provide support.

Mindfulness Techniques and Scripts

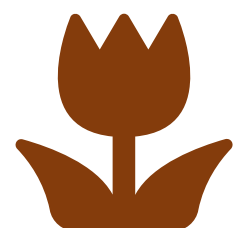
The Basics of Mindfulness Meditation

1. Have a seat on the floor or in a chair, making sure to keep your back straight. Begin by taking a deep breath and close your eyes.
2. Breathe normally and focus on your breathing. Feel the air moving in and out of your lungs.
3. You will probably experience thoughts or distractions, but as you do, don't give them too much attention. Instead, acknowledge that your mind has wandered and then move your focus back to your breathing.
4. Start by doing this a few minutes each day and gradually increasing your time, staying comfortable.

The following mindfulness techniques are from Sung Yang at www.learnmindfulness.org (Mindfulness Techniques, 2010)

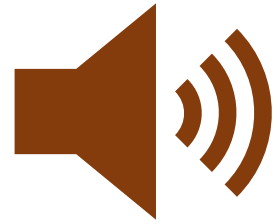
Mindfulness of Smell

1. Be aware of a smell in your environment, notice if it is sweet, floral, fruity, spicy, or something else.
2. Be aware of the intensity of the smell, do you find that it is weak, moderate, or strong.
3. Be aware of the source of the smell, can you identify it?
4. Be aware of any sensation it brings to your nose.
5. Be aware of feeling whether the smell is pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.



Mindfulness of Sounds

1. Select a sound among all different sounds in your environment, for example, a dominant sound or most distinctive sound.
2. Be aware of pitch—does it have a high or low frequency?
3. Be aware of a pattern or lack of pattern to the sound.
4. Be aware of the direction—where the sound is coming from.
5. Be aware of distance—how far the distance the sound is coming from.
6. Be aware of whether the source of sound is moving or not.
7. Be aware of the duration of the sound, whether short or long, or if it is a continuous sound.
8. Be aware of a gap or silence in between sounds or is it a continuous sound.
9. Be aware of an echo, if there is any.
10. Be aware of the harmonic effect of sound if it is being combined with another sound.
11. Be aware if any quality of the sound changes.
12. Be aware of the source of the sound, for example, a refrigerator, a car, a bird.
13. Be aware of the factors that allowed the sound to come into existence.



"We are too busy listening to our thoughts that we don't hear the wonderful sounds surrounding us..."
-Alina Radoi

Resources:

- <http://go.illinois.edu/healthyfamilies> - go to Self-Care and Wellness section
- <https://mindfulness.illinois.edu/resources/>
- <https://mckinley.illinois.edu/health-education/stress-management/relaxation-techniques>
- <http://www.psc.illinois.edu/mindfulness/> U of I psych services
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990) Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness." New York: Delacorte

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Additional Quotes

- *"Few of us ever live in the present. We are forever anticipating what is to come or remembering what has gone." Louis L'Amour*
- *"Be happy in the moment; that's enough. Each moment is all we need, not more." Mother Teresa*
- *"I am the master of my mind and fate." Lailah Gifty Akita*
- *"Feelings come and go like clouds in a windy sky. Conscious breathing is my anchor." Thích Nhất Hạnh*
- *"The present moment is filled with joy and happiness. If you are attentive, you will see it." Thích Nhất Hạnh*
- *"Meditation trains the mind the way physical exercise strengthens the body." Sharon Salzberg*
- *"This is today! What will tomorrow bring? Life arrives and departs on its own schedule, not ours; it's time to travel light and be ready to go wherever it takes us." Meg Wolfe*

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