

A Taste of Mindfulness

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[RESOURCES](#)

Synopsis: Key Take-Aways from Today's Presentation

For many years, the practice of mindfulness meditation has been studied and scientifically examined with results that directly reduce everyday stress and increase overall happiness. Mindfulness is also a skill that brings awareness to patterns of behavior, making it easier to identify the signals of anxiety and depression before they become problems.

But how exactly does mindfulness work? And how should one begin to practice the techniques in order to increase everyday wellbeing?

Defining Mindfulness

Mindfulness is intentionally paying attention to the present moment. This particular way of paying attention gives rise to more agency in the moment and the opportunity to relate differently to any given situation.

Another word for mindfulness is *awareness*; but you might be wondering, "What's the big deal about awareness?" If you're not aware of something, it's impossible to change it. The moment we become aware of what's happening, the possibility to change is suddenly there.

Mindfulness allows us to have awareness about our thoughts and habitual patterns. We see things without filters, lenses, or judgments. This ability to step back and see things clearly turns out to be the window into insight on habits that we wish to change.

Mindfulness can also help us stop and notice how things are in an objective way. Rather than getting caught up in problem-solving mode, we can notice where the mind is going and be fully aware of the present moment *as it is happening*.

Finally, mindfulness helps us to find a way to re-center ourselves and move out of chronic stress. It helps us stay in the present moment rather than caught up in thoughts of the past or future, which perpetuate the stress response cycle. When practiced for at least 20 minutes, and ideally up to 45 minutes per day, the structure and function of the brain can actually change.

We call this change in the brain *neuroplasticity* – the ability of the brain to form and reorganize synaptic connections, especially in response to learning or experience.

What are the Benefits of Mindfulness?

Physical

- Boosts Energy Levels
- Improves Sleep
- Reduces Effects of Chronic Pain
- Improves Heart Function
- Helps with Digestive Problems

Mental

- Relieves Stress
- Reduces Anxiety
- Improves Mood and Happiness
- Boosts Concentration and Focus
- Improves Self-Esteem

What is Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)?

This intervention has been one of the most widely studied programs in secular based meditation practice. MBSR is structured as an eight-week course where participants meet 2.5 hours once per week and are encouraged to meditate at home daily for 45 minutes. There is also a full day silent retreat as a component of the course.

History of MBSR

The MBSR program was started in 1979 when Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D., started a clinic where U. Mass Medical School doctors would send patients who were in chronic pain when all traditional treatments proved ineffective! Kabat-Zinn, an MIT-trained molecular biologist and long-time meditator, created the intervention called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction.

How to Integrate Mindfulness in Daily Life

- By developing a daily practice: using guided audio and enrolling in a meditation course can help facilitate this.
- Simply taking a few moments, maybe five to ten minutes, to just stop and notice your breath. You can do this at a doctor's office, at work, or at home; it is really accessible.
- You could use sound the same way; just having an awareness of the sounds that surround you.
- Practice with noticing daily activities like washing dishes, walking, driving, etc.

- Mindfulness also comes in handy when you are talking with others, by listening and really hearing.
- Practice eating mindfully.

Mindfulness can be translated into all of our daily lives if we can be awake for each moment. Literally anything can be a mindfulness practice; it is a practice of a thousand beginnings!

Resources:

1. <https://equilibrium-mbsr.com/>
2. <https://youtu.be/hQo-CQzoW24>
3. <https://www.ummhealth.org/umass-memorial-medical-center/services-treatments/center-for-mindfulness/mindfulness-classes>
4. <https://www.brown.edu/public-health/mindfulness/class/mindfulness>

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