

Mindfulness

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Mindfulness is the practice of purposely focusing your attention on the present moment, and accepting it without judgement. Ultimately, mindfulness leads to you having the ability and awareness to control and manage your thoughts, rather than the opposite: your thoughts controlling and managing you. Another way of looking at mindfulness is considering its opposite, 'being mindless'. To be mindless is simply to react in a primal way to external stimuli. Whilst you may think you have a degree of control over your responses to adversity or situations the truth is generally you do not. You react according to deep, strong programs based in the sub-conscious brain. This is mindless behaviour.

The question we all ask is why? What is the advantage is being more mindful?

Research has shown many benefits, in fact too many benefits to ignore, and many of these benefits are quite specific to our patient's needs and outcomes.

As mindfulness brings you back to the present it helps with disorders that focus on negative future or past events, these include depression, anxiety, perfectionism, compulsive behaviours, conflict etc.

We are often in a state of overwhelmed stress (too much to do in too little time, and too worried), by coming back to the present and creating a singular, present focus (via meditation), the brain and body have a chance to let go and get back to a relaxed focus. It is possible from this point to select thoughts which are more positive and that give us

RESEARCHED PROVEN BENEFITS

PHYSICAL

- Improved well-being
- Reduction in stress
- Reduces symptoms of heart disease
- Reduction in hypertension
- Reduction in chronic pain
- Improves sleep
- Improves GI problems

MENTAL

- Reduces anxiety
- Reduces depression
- Reduces substance abuse
- Helps with eating disorders
- Improves obsessive – compulsive behaviour
- Helps with couples conflict
- Increase subjective well-being (happiness)



energy rather than being a prisoner to thoughts which are often negative and energy draining. Once in a 'better state of mind' we move from the flight and fight mode (which has a very narrow focus) to a more relaxed and positive mode from which we can see opportunity. This is part of the 'broaden and build theory'. This means the more relaxed, optimistic and positive we are, the more likely we are to see solutions to problems. The more stressed and worried we are the less likely we are to find creative solutions to problems.

LEARNING MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness can be cultivated through mindful mediation (relaxation/distraction). Simply meditation is a systematic method of focusing your attention on singularity. As well as meditation activities such as Tai Chi or yoga can induce the relaxation response, which is valuable in reducing the body's reaction to stress

Meditation and mindfulness can be practiced either formally or informally.

FORMAL MEDITATION

- Sit on a straight backed chair, or adopt any comfortable posture
- Focus on any aspect of your breathing, such as air flowing through your nostrils or your belly rising and falling. You may count your breaths, and try to be aware of all the sensations associated with breathing. Try counting 5 lots of 10 breaths.
- You may draw the outline of a number in your mind, as if using

pencil to do so. Start at 20 and quietly and slowly work back to 0.

- Be aware of the weight of your arms and legs as they get heavier the more you relax.
- Scan your body for any tension and then let the tension go, gently becoming heavier and more relaxed.
- Once you have narrowed your concentration begin to widen your focus. Become aware of sounds, sensations and your ideas
- Embrace and consider each thought or sensation without judging it to be good or bad. If your mind starts to race return to your breathing, then expand your awareness again.
- Try to find that state at which you are at peace with your thoughts and in which have some control over them.

INFORMAL MEDITATION

- Start by bringing your attention to the sensations of your body
- Breathe in via your nose, allowing the air downward into your lower belly. Let your abdomen expand fully
- Now breathe out via your mouth
- Note the sensation of each inhalation and exhalation
- Proceed with the task at hand and with full deliberation
- When you notice your mind has wandered from the task at hand, gently bring your attention to sensations of the moment.

SOME POINTS

Pain is only a sensation, attached to a threat of some kind. See these sensations as friendly; do not label them as a pain but a friendly sensation that will pass.

Be mindful and aware of what makes you feel better, and more energised. Try to adopt these behaviours and postures more.

Realise that sometimes doing less is more. Rest and recovery is as important as activity. Work in a focused way with clear purpose, but then realise the role rest has after activity.

Try to understand how powerful the brain can be in overcoming adversity and if you can give it relaxed focus it can achieve almost anything.

