

## MINDFULNESS

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### Abstract

*In recent years, there has been an explosion of interest in mindfulness with widespread media coverage, books and online resources. Mindfulness means paying attention to what's happening in the present moment in the mind, body and external environment, with an attitude of curiosity and kindness. It is typically cultivated by a range of simple meditation practices, which aim to bring a greater awareness of thinking, feeling and behavior patterns, and to develop the capacity to manage these with greater skill and compassion. Mindfulness can be practiced to support lifestyle and behavioral changes, decrease perceived stress, enhance quality of life, and, ultimately, improve health and health outcomes. This is found to lead to an expansion of choice and capacity in how to meet and respond to life's challenges, and therefore live with greater wellbeing, mental clarity and care for yourself and others.*

**Keywords:** *Mindfulness, Mindfulness-oriented Interventions, Mindfulness Meditation, Psychological Health, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, multi-tasking, mental, anxious, conversation, remember, appreciate.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Mindfulness is defined as “the practice of maintaining a non-judgmental state of heightened or complete awareness of one’s thoughts, emotions, or experiences on a moment-to-moment basis.” It means focusing your attention purposefully, on the moment and, without judgment, observing all aspects of the world around you as well as your thoughts, feelings and reactions.

It is really the opposite to being absent-minded or being overwhelmed by the thoughts of what we need to do, what happened in our past, or what we should have done. We become anxious and afraid and we feel like life is slipping away. We believe that life has no meaning and is out of control. We are racing around at super speed and we are afraid to slow down. And living this way, we miss the actual life we ARE living – we miss living in TODAY. There is little or no conscious effort made to PAUSE, BREATHE; do nothing and just be.

However, one must also recognize that being present in the moment does not mean that you don’t have goals you want to achieve. It just means that you are consciously and purposefully aware of the HERE and NOW, as you move towards achieving your goals. Ask yourself – what is it I need to do NOW to help me achieve my goal? You set a goal and work towards it, focusing on each and every present moment.

### 2. GETTING WITH THE MINDFULNESS

Usually, we undertake the things in different perspective just as we may be eating our breakfast but at the same time we are thinking about our ‘To-Do List’ for the day. Similarly, we may be at our child’s school play but, we are on the phone continuously texting a colleague. We are having a conversation with a neighbor or a friend, but we are not listening. We are thinking about what to cook for dinner, we even log into calls while driving to work. The urge is to multi-task – ALL the time! We are living at the speed of machines. We get so busy making a living that we forget to get and LIVE a life!

Instead, how about eating your breakfast and relishing the taste, enjoying it. This helps your body absorb nutrients better. At the school play, watch your beautiful child sing and dance and take pride, celebrate even! The child will be ever so happy that you noticed and remembered every little detail. Pay attention to your conversations. Listen deeply to other human beings or friends and colleagues. Your friends will appreciate you for the time and attention you gave them.

### 3. THINGS TO REMEMBER

Being actively mindful allows one to actually LIVE in the moment. It:

- brings calmness
- helps to relax, lets you pause and breathe
- allows to appreciate small joys of life
- increases awareness and brings into focus what is really happening NOW
- improves efficiency, increases creativity
- brings a sense of balance
- allows to have a fresh and new perspective of life

Practicing mindfulness is also said to help one's physical being by improving heart function, regulating blood pressure, elevating immune system function, improving sleep and digestion, memory and mental function, thereby leading to a more healthier life ahead.

Mindfulness could also be used by anyone to simply enrich life, to expand the capacity to live and love, to deal with life's ups and downs in a clear and calm manner. This is particularly true if your life's journey is no longer an adventure but an obsessive need to arrive, to attain, and to "make it." If one's life is a constant search to find contentment somewhere in the future rather than fully living in today, mindfulness practice could definitely help find calm in the present. It has been rightly said by **Alice Morse Earle** that

*"Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, today is a gift and that is why it is called the PRESENT"*

### 4. PRACTICING MINDFULNESS

There are three different segments to practice mindfulness, i.e., being mindful in everyday life, mindfulness meditation and everyday mindfulness check-in.

#### a) Everyday Practice

It will be most helpful if one practices mindfulness in every aspect of our everyday life. When we are angry, upset or hurt about something, being mindful would be to stop right there, immediately observe the moment and be aware of our reactions. Mindfulness requires actively withdrawing attention from the past and the future. Our mind tends to escape the present into the future or the past; both illusory. The future is either imagined to be better or worse than the present. Your past is a history of good or bad experiences which are not the present moment. Just be present in the current moment.

#### Examples

- While going through your daily routine such as brushing your teeth or having a shower, simply smell the toothpaste or the shower gel, feel the warmth of the water and the freshness it brings to you.
- Have your cup of coffee or tea, with being fully present in enjoying the warm, soothing feeling. When eating your food, avoid eating while watching TV or working. Make meal times a mindfulness time. Be present, feel the texture and relish the taste of the flavors. Eat every morsel slowly, enjoying every bite.
- When talking with someone, really listen and hear what they are saying without judging them, thinking of other things, or planning what you want to say next.
- When you are driving to work, just drive. Keep your focus on the road, traffic and being safe. Avoid taking calls and try not to text messages while driving. This habit of being mindful while driving may even save your life someday!

- Bed time is yet another opportunity to practice mindfulness. Try not to go to bed with a million things on your mind. Make it a ritual to clear your mind, relax and take a few deep breaths. Bring your mind to the present moment; focus on relaxing mind and body, preparing to sleep.

#### **b) Mindfulness Meditation**

Mindfulness meditation starts with a purposeful PAUSE. The idea is to stop and bring our focus to the current moment. By observing our emotions and the ups and downs of life, we learn to move and adapt as things change. We learn to DANCE with life. For achieving this objective, there is a need to find a calm quiet place to relax and be with yourself. Make the space around you as comfortable as you can. You could even light an incense stick or a candle. Do those things whichever works for YOU. Sit down on the floor or a comfortable chair and make sure your body posture is comfortable. Begin when you feel ready.

**Step 1:** Close your eyes if you are comfortable with that. This just helps take away distractions and focus on inner self. Take a few deep breaths and relax. Breathe normally but be aware of your breathing.

**Step 2:** Whatever thoughts enter your mind, allow yourself to think about it. Be aware of what these thoughts make you feel. Be open to whatever emotions these thoughts bring. Let whatever happens in your body or mind happen. Don't try to fight the flow of thoughts. The idea is to remain in this unrestricted state and allow different thoughts to flow.

**Step 3:** Observe and acknowledge thoughts and emotions without any judgment. If there is a judgment, observe how it affects your emotions or your physical body. Allow any and all thoughts to come into your conscious without indulging, analyzing or trying to resolve anything. Just let it slide! Looking at these thoughts in a non-judgmental way, takes the power away from the situation in controlling your emotions.

**Step 4:** This meditation can be done for even 15-20 minutes or longer. Practice whatever you are comfortable with. When you are ready to end a session, bring back your focus on your breathing. Take a few deep breaths, offer gratitude and slowly open your eyes. One can even practice the habit of writing a journal after each session. Note down what you thought about, how you felt, what the emotions were and what the body sensations were. Just write as the thoughts flow. Don't try to write full sentences or make sure the grammar is perfect. Just put the words down. Journaling has been found to be very cathartic and over the period of time, one could gain tremendous insight into one's own behavioral patterns.

#### **c) Everyday Check-In**

This is a shorter everyday version of the mindfulness meditation. What you essentially do, is set aside 3-5 minutes at a particular time of the day, every day. This could be as soon as you wake up or sitting in the car just before you are ready to drive to work, may be at your work desk just before you begin work for the day or even just before you go to bed. The choice is entirely yours. The practice is very much like the full-fledged meditation but much shorter and more like a daily routine task. It involves giving that time to check-in how you are feeling in that moment, being aware of your thoughts, emotions and your physical body. The idea is to take a few moments to PAUSE and deliberately set aside time and give ourselves the space. There is no judgement or analysis. These moments are just to let it all be as is. Once we are able to integrate the practice of mindfulness into our life, our perspectives change. Below is a short list of things that mindful people may do differently.

#### **Eight Things That Mindful People Do Differently**

- Show compassion for self
- Approach everyday things with curiosity and savor them
- Forgive their own mistakes big or small
- Practice compassion and nurture connections

- Make peace with imperfection
- Embrace vulnerability by trusting others and themselves
- Show gratitude to self and others
- Accept and appreciate self, others and situations

## 5. MINDFULNESS AND COACHING

There is no doubt that a coach definitely should be a mindfulness practitioner. Apart from the benefits to self as a person, mindfulness also greatly benefits the coaching practice. It enables one to be fully present as a coach. It improves coaching presence by making active listening an automatic skill. Mindfulness makes us more curious and less judgmental. It helps us to prepare for each coaching session – purposefully making time just before the session to gather our thoughts. We are less attached to the result or outcome and that makes it easier to go where the client wants to go. Mindfulness is a simple but very powerful practice that will go a long way in enabling us to do what we really want to do – DANCE with the client!

## CONCLUSION

Mindfulness can be practiced to support lifestyle and behavioral changes, decrease perceived stress, enhance quality of life, and, ultimately, improve health and health outcomes. By observing our emotions and the ups and downs of life, we learn to move and adapt as things change. Whatever thoughts enter your mind, allow yourself to think about it. Be aware of what these thoughts make you feel. Be open to whatever emotions these thoughts bring. Don't try to fight the flow of thoughts. Mindfulness is a simple but very powerful practice that will go a long way in enabling us to do what we really want to do.

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