

A scenic landscape photograph of a mountain valley. In the foreground, there is a grassy field with scattered rocks and small shrubs. A dense forest of evergreen trees lines the middle ground. In the background, a calm lake reflects the sky, with a small boat visible in the distance. The lake is flanked by steep, rugged mountains. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds, and the overall lighting is gentle, suggesting a misty or overcast day.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness Is:

- Purposefully focusing attention on the present moment AND accepting the present without judgement
- Skill of opening ourselves to reality without judgment

receptivity



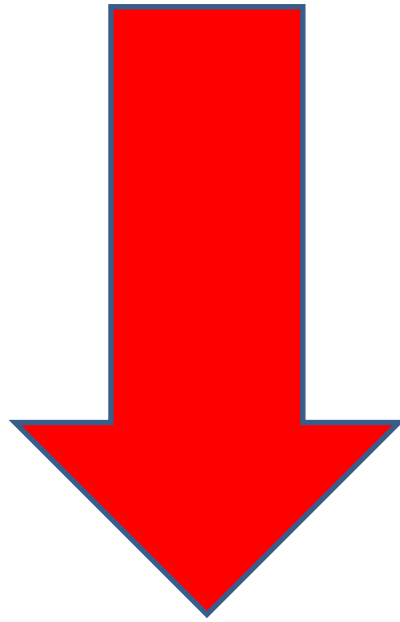
Mindfulness

- Is defined as awareness focused on the present while avoiding judgment or evaluation
- It is the skill of moment-to-moment observation of your experience as it unfolds without constantly comparing and assessing
- By not judging our experiences, we **allow** a high degree of openness, receptivity, and inquisitiveness so that we are able to observe the dynamics and details that often escape our notice



We have all naturally experienced something similar to mindfulness:

- Think back to when you have felt endangered:
- Say you were hiking in the wild and you thought you were alone, but suddenly found out you were threatened





FEAR sets in!

- You experienced a heightened sense of awareness,
- Time seemed slowed,
- Your internal dialogue was suspended,
- Your conscious activity sharpened,
- Later on, your memory of the circumstance is lucid;
- This increased attentiveness is caused by a natural universal human faculty



Be in touch with reality

The chief goal of Mindfulness

- Is not relaxation, stress reduction, or self-improvement, but knowing yourself and your world better



- Attentiveness clearly teaches us that there is a lot in the world that we have no control over, but we do have some control over how our minds operate
- We can recognize patterns of thinking that are detrimental to our well-being and that affect the well-being of others
- We can handle anger effectively, want for less, and be more courageous and compassionate because our expectations are more realistic



Connection with Nature



HEALTH BENEFITS
-mental and physical



Health Benefits

- In one study, Mindfulness cut risk of heart attacks, strokes, and death from all causes by half
 - control group was given education about healthy living and diet

A photograph of the Mount Rushmore National Memorial in the United States. The image shows the four large granite faces of the presidents: George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln. The faces are carved into the mountain and are looking in various directions. The sky is blue with some white and yellow clouds, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The text "Acceptance of death" is written in a white, italicized font in the upper right area of the image.

Acceptance of death

Awareness of reality stops
suffering

Culturally the reality of death, loss, and suffering is generally denied, so shock and surprise and the feeling of being punished are not unusual responses to their occurrence. While Mindfulness will not stop us from dying, it can help us accept the reality of death so that we suffer less and have less need to grieve the loss of others.

--consider how this might be labeled “negative thinking”



Mindfulness helps us understand that
relinquishing our attachment to everything we
think will make us happy will actually lead to our
happiness and empowerment

Free/less to lose/more at peace/more ease





Practicing Mindfulness eventually leads to:

- Wisdom, defined as the ability to see clearly into the fundamental nature of reality

compassion



Mindfulness results in less perfectionism

Compassion is defined as the desire to alleviate suffering. When practiced on ourselves, compassion may allow us to alleviate perfectionism.



Think of self as part of reality

Acceptance of the self (ego) as an entity not separate from the rest of reality, allowing easier acceptance of mortality, yours and others



Developing a life of generosity helps us to understand our desire to attach to “things” (objects, places, people, groups, etc.)



Mindfulness fosters ability to work with physical discomfort

- Understanding the difference between pain and suffering: pain is a physical response; suffering is an emotional response caused by craving by the ego and by personal desire
- Grief and loss, and even our own mortality may be faced without fear or aversion if we do not avoid and deny death and suffering, both inevitable in life but culturally distressing



Mindfulness

- May alter your perception of yourself, your world, and your place in the world
- Is helpful in preventing or treating burnout
- Is helpful in dealing with chronic pain, grief and anger

FUNCTIONS OF THE BRAIN



The functions of the Mind

- Consciousness
- Thought
- Perception
- Memory
- Emotion
- Willing
- Reasoning
- Imagination



An untrained mind will:

- Generate a constant swirl of remarks and judgments
- Distract us with words and images, so that even messages from our heart will be easily overridden within 90 seconds by the desire to be consistent and maintain the image we have of ourselves
- Gravitate to the past or the future when the mind is unoccupied because we are following our usual routines

A landscape photograph of a mountain range with multiple layers of peaks and valleys. The scene is heavily misty or foggy, creating a sense of depth and atmosphere. The colors are predominantly shades of blue and white, with the foreground mountains in a darker blue and the distant peaks fading into a pale, hazy white. The text "Dreamt up reality" is overlaid in the bottom right corner in a white, handwritten-style font.

*Dreamt
up
reality*

- Once involved in the past or future, our minds start making instantaneous judgments about what we are experiencing—these judgments, thoughts and emotions are often unwelcome and often cause suffering
- Drugs, amusements and other forms of distraction are used to prevent these unwelcome experiences, making our lives frenzied



Mindfulness and Mental Conditioning

- Helps the mind produce thoughts that contribute to our well-being and to the well-being of the whole world
- The more we entertain a particular thought or a particular kind of thought, the more we are prone to generate similar thoughts (“a process called **mental conditioning**”)
- Even though our biological makeup and upbringing heavily affects our mental conditioning, the mind can be reconditioned, producing “free will” that must be cultivated



Mindfulness Meditation

Mindfulness Meditation

- Is a form of physical and mental exercise that is used to enlarge and refine mindfulness
- It is meant to strengthen the natural ability to bring moment-by-moment awareness to our lives



Rosey-colored, entertaining, distracting

What Mindfulness Meditation is not;

It is NOT:

- transcendent or trance-producing meditation, which is intended to gain extraordinary powers
- Mental activity associated with intensely mulling a thought or a problem over in the mind
- Unusual, mystical, or esoteric; nor intended to deepen spirituality or make you pious, as it is not intended to make you appear other than you are
- Easy or fast, as it requires persistence
- Consistently entered without terror, as being alone with your thoughts can be terrifying

Mindfulness Meditation is not:

- An escape from reality (rather it is an escape into reality!—such as constant change, death, and pervasive suffering)
- Self-centered: the sharp distinction between self and world gradually begins to fade with meditation, awakening empathy and compassion
- Considered a failure because you are having difficulty meditating



Failure in meditation practice:

You fail when you do not pay attention, but even failing to pay attention is not a failure if you realize that you are not paying attention.

If you just do the meditation you will neither succeed nor fail, so open your mind and keep your heart sincere as much as possible until you learn openness and sincerity—that is the point.

See what is there. Period.



Meditation

- Begin with focusing attention on the breath and observing when the mind strays without judging, then gently returning the attention to the breath
- Increases ability to concentrate and be aware
- Connects us to the rest of reality rather than seeing ourselves as separate from the rest of reality



Most religions have mindfulness practice included, but...

Religious belief is not required

- Mindfulness is a belief promoted by the Buddha to end suffering and promote well-being
- Mindfulness is prescribed to some degree in most religions, but it does not have to be connected to religious practice

Ethics Most Supporting Mindfulness



Five moral impediments to attentiveness

Vowing to change these behaviors make happiness much more likely:

1. Harming others
2. Stealing
3. Sexual misconduct
4. Lying
5. intoxication



(Higher ground)



Unethical behavior makes deeper mindfulness meditation difficult

- We are holistic; our physical, mental, ethical, and spiritual dimensions are interrelated
- Ethical conduct shapes personal character
- In the Buddhist religion the five virtues are presented as aspirations, rather than rules, so that punishment is not the issue, but the individual is responsible for the quality of their personality
- If you make a mistake, simply try again: observe and let it go! This is mindfulness



The Five Aspirations

1. I will endeavor not to harm sentient beings
 - acting on hate or fear reinforces the emotion and you are more likely to make poor choices
 - need to be more aware in order not to unintentionally harm
2. I will endeavor not to steal (including intangible theft caused by greed, envy, or power hunger)
3. I will endeavor not to misuse sexuality
 - variable definition between cultures, but universal principle
 - powerful threat to mindfulness, may lead to obsession

Five Aspirations (continued)

4. I will endeavor not to use false speech: lying, gossiping and slander, cursing and harsh language, and idle chatter (that is, talk lacking constructive purpose)
5. I will endeavor to not consume toxins (alcohol, tobacco, other substance impairing mental and bodily functions)
 - need clarity of mind to be attentive
 - avoid information overload or poor quality of data, including media stimulation overload



Meditation Practice

- Regular
- Gradually build up to 20-45 minutes daily
- Use a timer and be committed
- Avoid distractions, particularly noise
- Get stable and comfortable
 - If using a chair, keep both feet flat on the floor without crossing to avoid cramps
 - Elongate spine keeping back away from back of chair (maintain smooth body curves)
 - Relax shoulders down and back and relax jaw
 - If eyes open, look at ground in front of you about 6 ft away

Breathing—Focus for Attention

- Settle the mind with a focus, anchoring on a fixed place
- Position the body properly and take a few breaths to settle in
- Readjust position with mindfulness, if needed, but seek stability
- Acknowledge the intention to practice mindfulness (“setting your intention”)
- Establish a focal point (“anchor), which may be a place or a mantra, which is a short-saying or repeated syllables, or it may be an object, thought or bodily sensation
- Focus on breath and return to the breath when the mind wanders, but do not process distractions

Breath (continued)

- To calm the body, attend to the rhythm of the breath at whatever single site you most prominently sense the rhythms of inhalation and exhalation
- Breathe as effortlessly as possible
- Pay attention without judging or evaluating the experience
- Observe what you usually do not observe: the start of inhalation, when the inhalation ends, repetitions of ion exhalation

Breath (continued)

- When mind wanders, gently return attention to the breath; move on, as you develop concentration in this way
- Notice when you lose attentiveness and return to the breath, which is the focal point, but do not criticize: you are focusing on attentiveness, not whether you stay focused



Boredom is a desirable edge

- Our minds create novelty and excitement
- We think boredom is created by our circumstances, but it is the product of inattention, so pay attention! And do not judge—the boredom can become interesting
- Full engagement in the breath produces relaxation and a sensation of completeness
- Breathing connects us to our world and other people
- Each breath and each moment feels unique and the passage of time becomes more evident

Failure when meditating



Problems encountered in Meditation

- Problems help develop Mindfulness
- Confront, rather than avoid, problems (this denotes attitude needed to succeed)
- Use courage to accept suffering, as this will end suffering
- Fear is an essential element of courage, so feel fear fully to develop courage
- Facing difficulty is easier when difficulty is viewed as opportunity to grow in awareness, deepening our self-knowledge and compassion: watch, embrace, and learn from difficulties
- However, ease physical pain during meditation if it occurs



suffering

Suffering

- Suffering is not pain, but is a mental and emotional response
- Resistance to pain, such as wincing and groaning, is the immediate response to pain and causes suffering
- Conditioned brain responses to pain include a sense of unfairness, protest and then fear, which may even turn into panic
- Belief that pain should not happen to us, a belief that can condition anger, fear, panic, and disillusionment
- Being open to pain may produce compassionate mindfulness; being an observer to the pain may lessen the suffering and lessen the pain

Main Resource:

- The Great Courses:

Mark W. Muesse, Practicing Mindfulness: An Introduction to Meditation, 2011

Pictures of Mountains:

Pexels.com

<https://www.pexels.com/search/mountain/>



Live Long and Prosper!