

Empirically Supported Benefits of Mindfulness



Research has indicated that cultivating a more mindful way of being is associated with improvements in physical, mental and emotional health as well as a better quality of life. Mindfulness can help to:

- o Reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety
- o Reduce stress and stress-related medical symptoms
- o Reduce rumination and emotional reactivity
- o Enhance positive emotions
- o Enhance self-awareness and emotional control
- o Improve ability to focus attention
- o Boost working memory
- o Improve cognitive performance (e.g. problem solving, decision-making)
- o Increase cognitive flexibility
- o Enhance relationship satisfaction
- o Improve overall health and wellbeing (e.g., improve immune functioning)

"Having seen over 16,000 medical patients in our stress-reduction clinic, we can safely say that pretty much any individual with adequate motivation can learn to be less reactive and less stressed by cultivating mindfulness."

- Jon Kabat-Zinn, Founder of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Centre

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on Mental Health by:

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What is Mindfulness?

"Between stimulus and response there is a space, In that space is our power to choose our response, In our response lies our growth and our freedom."

- Victor E Frankel, Psychiatrist and Holocaust Survivor

Perhaps a good way to understand mindfulness is to describe the lack of it. Our minds are often preoccupied with mental chatter, such as going over and over things that have happened in the past or worrying about the future. The mind is often acting like a wild monkey, swinging from tree to tree. Our attention is rarely fully focused on the present moment.

Many of us go through the day on automatic-pilot mode. We often judge or evaluate what we experience based on conditioned beliefs and assumptions. We make hasty decisions or react automatically based on our habitual way of thinking and feeling. When we live our day on automatic-pilot mode, we are unaware of many things in the present moment, such as the sounds and sights of birds and nature around us or the rhythm of the morning rain.

Mindfulness is to be fully present in the moment and to each experience as it unfolds. According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Centre, mindfulness is "paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally. This kind of attention nurtures greater awareness, clarity, and acceptance of present-moment reality. It wakes us up to the fact that our lives unfold only in moments. If we are not fully present for many of those moments, we may not only miss what is most valuable in our lives but also fail to realize the richness and the depth of our possibilities for growth and transformation."

The cultivation of mindfulness over time helps us to develop the freedom to respond intentionally and purposefully to life, instead of reacting automatically. Mindfulness empowers us to respond skillfully and wisely to whatever is happening in the here and now, be it pleasant or unpleasant, wanted or unwanted.

"Recall that practice as we have been using the word is not a mechanical self-repetition of meditation instructions although it can sometimes subtly feel that way, but a commitment to reside as best one can from moment to moment in awareness with an open heart, a spacious, non-judging, nonreactive mind, and without trying to get anywhere, achieve anything, reject anything, or fall into either the stream of conceptual thought."

- Jon Kabat-Zinn, Founder of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Centre

How is Mindfulness cultivated?

Cultivating mindfulness typically involves a range of formal and informal mindfulness practices. They include paying attention to the sensations of the breath or the sensations that arise in the body. Other practices include bringing awareness to sounds, thoughts or feelings as they arise and everyday activities like walking and eating. The key intention of mindfulness practice is to maintain awareness in the present moment and use the objects of attention as an "anchor" to reconnect with the here and now whenever the mind wanders.

With regular mindfulness practice, we develop the ability to focus and sustain attention for longer periods of time. We learn that no matter how active and chaotic our mind is, there is an inherent stillness within. With a calm mind, we learn to have more control over our choices and actions (responses). To reap the benefits of mindfulness requires a commitment to regular practice, which makes it easier to be present in the here and now experience, and increase our well-being and quality of life.