

A Definition of Mindfulness



Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way:

on purpose,

in the present moment,

and nonjudgmentally.

- JON KABAT-ZINN



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Mindful Meditation: What it offers for the professional © Dr. Kenneth Manges, 2013.

What if someone suggested you could improve the quality of your life by sitting down and taking a moment of silence to watch, but not act on the rumblings of your mind? Stopping the internal chatter about the past and future which distract you from the present? Ignoring the negative self-talk, and the voice of your inner critic and just being non-judgmental for a few moments each day?

What if that same someone told you; you could decrease your level of stress while simultaneously improve your ability to concentrate and recall information that was otherwise eluding you?

What if they then told you mindfulness meditation could alter your biological processes to reduce your susceptibility to the flu?

Would you suggest they were out of their mind! Or would you consider taking a moment and listening to more of what they had to say? Well, if interested in the latter, read a littler further.

Conducting a search for mindfulness on the internet resulted in Google indicating there were about 12,300,000 results. You might think that was the result of a new and now desired interventional shrink strategy that had recently realized success. This belief would be misleading.

Biblically there are multiple references in both the old and new testaments, suggesting that prayer and meditation are on an equal level of consciousness (but not equal spiritual footing or shall I say, mental being).

Moving to the 20th and 21st centuries, scientists have found that mediation, relaxation, and mindfulness can effectively; decrease stress and lower heart rate resulting in a reduced level for hypertensive medication (Broms, 1999), reduce anger outbursts, (Barbieri, 1997), as well as, realize a lessened level of anxiety and depression (Kabat-Zinn, et al. 1992).

Therapists reported a marked improvement in the development of insight suggesting meditation can be an important adjunct to counseling (Kutz et al., 1985).

Attentiveness is also positively effected. Comparing persons who meditate to those who do not, when given a task where the object (stimulus) was unexpected, the group who meditated demonstrated superior performance on the test of sustained attention in comparison with controls, and long-term meditators were superior to short-term meditators (Valentine & Sweet, 1999).

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Chronic pain is also reduced. When comparing the benefit of meditation with cognitive behavioral therapy, only participants in the mindfulness meditation condition significantly improved on the Somatization (expression of suffering) (Kabat-Zinn, *ibid*).

Davidson, et. al. 2002, demonstrated that a short program in mindfulness meditation produces demonstrable effects on brain and immune function. Suggesting that meditation may change brain and immune function in positive ways.

Deep muscle relaxation is the physical use of various muscle groups that you tense and relax to gain an overall physical sense of relief. **Mediation** in the Buddhist sense of the term is the focus of one's attention on an object (think candle) or activity (think mantra). But mindfulness is different.

Relaxation, meditation and mantras can be a part of mindfulness, but each of these are only a part of the picture. Not the unlike the law being only a part of being a lawyer, law and lawyering; mindfulness and mantras are not the same.

Elisha Goldstein, Ph.D. (2010) describes mindfulness as *the ability to cultivate awareness of the present moment while putting aside our lenses of judgment. It is being in connection with the direct experience of the present moment, the here and now. The practice of mindfulness offers us the unique strength of learning how to control our own minds, instead of our minds controlling us.*

The object of mindfulness is to take a moment and focus on the object or activity you are doing. But don't try this while driving your car or making a presentation in court.

The object is to be in the moment. A typical example offered by trainers is to consider how we are different drivers from when we first got behind the wheel of an automobile and how we are as now experienced road warriors. When we first learned to drive we were conscious of *everything, the cars in the other lane, our foot on the brake, our speed, the closeness to the car next to us.* Then we became relaxed, even mindless. Now (some) text, talk on the phone, and even forget driving altogether. That's fine, unless we are so mindless we have an accident or forget to pick up the groceries. Mindfulness is the act of being going back to the beginning of the action, and to take a moment to watch what happens. Here's an exercise to try it out.

Here is an introduction to the experience. Sitting silently without interruption for a few moments (five to ten will be sufficient), have your eyes partially closed so some light can be seen, sit at your desk or in a comfortable chair. Allow the thoughts to pass by without labeling, judging or prioritizing. Breathe in, until your lungs are full, breathe out until your lungs are empty. There, you have just accomplished mindfulness at the most basic level. Want to go further? Consider doing the same breathing in and breathing out while keeping your eyes open and taking your pencil or pen and focus on writing your name. Do each letter slowly so you take a full minute to write your first name only. If you would like to try meditating while eating, follow you're your mother always told you to do. Chew your food. Take a forkful, look at the food on the fork, place it in your mouth, slowly chew and focus on the taste, then as you swallow focus on the food going down your throat. This eating process will take you at least a minute if you do it in a

mindful way. Certainly no way to have a power lunch, but mindfulness is about the experience, not the politics of writing, eating etc. *Meditation for Dummies* by Stephan Bodian is a good place to start. Kabat-Zinn's 1990 book *Full Catastrophe living*, is an oldie but a goody you might consider for more intensive reading. If interested, following Goldstein's suggestions, you can participate in mindfulness walking (with your eyes open of course), eating, writing, dressing, etc. Every physical act we do can become a template for a mindfulness action.

Mark Williams and Danny Penman have an eight week course in their text *Mindfulness: An eight week plan for finding peace in a frantic world*. Give it a try, who knows, you may just become healthier in the process.

Broms, C. (1999). Free from stress by autogenic therapy. Relaxation technique yielding peace of mind and self-insight. *Lakartidningen*, 96(6):588-92.

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Purposely Using Mindfulness On A Daily Basis

This approach has been present in my life for some time. During my typical daily mindfulness meditation I have become aware of different issues that deplete my resources and energy. Below are some of the things I have learned. If you practice and learn others, please share.

1. **Mainstream your life.** Done on a daily basis mindfulness can reinforce your will, spirit, and daily needs. It becomes an act of habit that solidifies your daily life.
2. **Discover your priorities.** When you are mindful, your meditation will begin to show you how your daily actions, your priorities are influencing you. You can decide to keep the priority or change it.
3. **Face your fears.** The quietness of mindfulness provides the space for your fears to surface so that you can face and dismantle them.
4. **Acknowledge your strengths.** Daily mindful meditations will allow you to personally acknowledge your strengths and weakness. Pause to say thank you for both.
5. **Recognize your common humanity.** Daily rituals remind us of not only our individual spirit, but of our connectedness to all human spirit. We sometimes overlook our own faults and focus on the faults of others. Both are a distraction. Keep the mindful activity positive.
6. **Discover what calms your soul.** When you practice mindfulness it will transcend through consciousness to sub- and even un-consciousness levels. You will be helped to know that there are neurons and synapses that are reaping the benefit of your activity.
7. **Identify with your spirituality.** When you choose to be mindful you allow yourself to connect with your personal meaningfulness.
8. **Reinforce your creative consciousness.** Each deliberate mindful event connects you with your creative self.
9. **Develop your instincts.** our mindfulness will enable you to better connect with your natural instincts.
10. **Create incredible well-being.** When mindful I connect my physical, mental and spiritual self through becoming conscious of my well-being: dietary choices, thoughts and movement throughout the day. Each of us chooses our path(s) for well-being. Mindfulness supports our path(s).

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