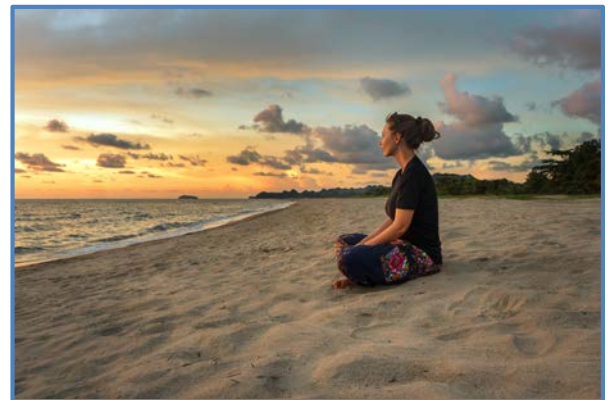


Mindfulness Matters, Part 1

Mindfulness has many definitions. Some think of it as walking through the woods or sitting near the sea watching the waves come in. Some think of people sitting cross-legged, burning candles and chanting. Others think of it as being present with what you're doing, such as setting down your cell phone during dinner to focus on the people at your table.

Psychology Today gives the following definitions of mindfulness:

- Mindfulness is letting go of taking things for granted. This means, we accept what we've been given in life and appreciate it.
- Mindfulness means returning to the present moment. A common misconception of mindfulness is that we *stay* in the present moment. Reality is, no one stays in the present. However, we can *return* our mind to the present moment, return to our breath or senses that can be found in the present moment.
- Mindfulness is the self-regulation of attention with an attitude of curiosity, openness and acceptance. This is the operational, scientific definition of mindfulness agreed upon by mindfulness researchers almost 15 years ago.
- Mindfulness is the state of being aware of your present moment; of paying attention on purpose to the present moment nonjudgmentally.



The benefits of mindfulness

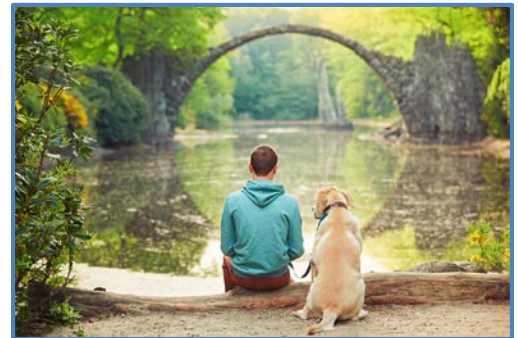
- **Reduces stress:** Mindfulness has a positive effect on a person's stress. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction is a stress reduction program created in the 1970s to aid hospital patients with their stress and has been adapted for a broad range of people. Now, with decades of experience and tens of thousands of practitioners world-wide, the results from this program have shown mindfulness effectively addresses stress. Recent studies show it can help you to improve emotion regulation and coping mechanisms.
- **Helps you deal with illness:** In studies of patients with cancer or chronic conditions, mindfulness has been shown to reduce their stress and worry, improve their pain management and improve their quality of life. It also has been shown to help caregivers with stress, anxiety and depression.
- **Improves general health:** A 2016 study showed that mindfulness affects our general health just as getting regular check-ups, being physically active, using a seat belt, and avoiding nicotine and alcohol. A 2015 study showed mindfulness is related to cardiovascular health through a lower incidence of smoking, healthier weight and more physical activity. Mindfulness has been positively linked to lower blood pressure, improved eating behaviors and decreased anxiety.

- **Improves job performance:** A 2014 study showed that people who completed an eight-week mindfulness program experienced lower levels of work-related stress, greater job satisfaction and enhanced job performance as rated by their employers. Researchers found in 2015 that call center employees who took part in a brief mindfulness intervention reported decreased stress, anxiety, depression and fatigue, while also experiencing greater satisfaction at work.
- **Helps your brain:** Practicing mindfulness can have positive effects on your brain. Neuroplasticity is the ability of your brain to change and adapt over time. When we practice mindfulness, we send the message to our brain that we're more effective at dealing with everyday tasks when we're aware, observant, nonreactive and nonjudgmental. This causes our brain to make the changes that will improve the ability to function mindfully.

How to practice mindfulness

Try this:

1. Find a quiet place, free from distraction.
2. Set aside a time. Start with two to three minutes. You can increase time as you get used to the practice.
3. Notice what you're feeling. Are you lying on the ground or sitting on a chair? How does that feel?
4. Notice your breathing. Where do you feel it? In your nose? Throat? Chest?
5. Notice what you can hear. Do you hear birds? Cars? Music? The wind? Your furnace?
6. If your mind wanders, acknowledge it and then refocus on your breath.



SOURCES: positivepsychologyprogram.com/benefits-of-mindfulness/*, positivepsychologyprogram.com/mindfulness-based-stress-reduction-mbsr/*

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