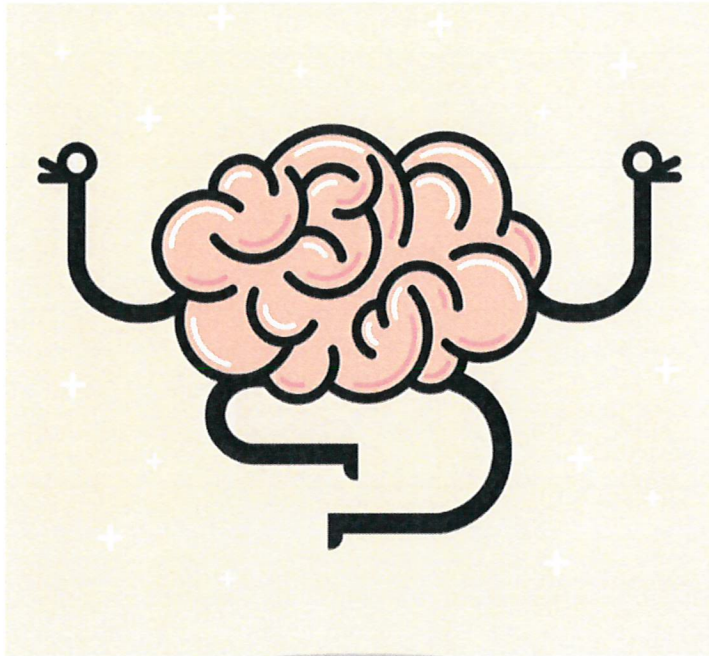


North Shore Center LLC

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Mindfulness

Everyone gets stressed but is there a way we can be mindful enough to control it? Mindfulness is a form of meditation that encourages one to focus their energies on the present moment. It asks people to take the mind's focus off of the past, current, or future stresses and focus on the situation they are currently living. For those who engage in mindfulness, they might be asked to attend to the sights, sounds, and smells that surround them; or they may focus on their body and breathing. Breath awareness is a type of mindfulness, and its use in other forms of meditation suggests that certain mindfulness techniques provide a base for other

types of meditation practices. Regardless of the type, mindfulness is the aspect of all meditations that encourages one to relax and self-reflect. Research on mindfulness and other forms of meditation suggests that there are lasting mental and physical health benefits for those who engage in these practices. For mindfulness, some of these benefits include improved memory and focus, impulse and emotional control, satisfaction in relationships, and reduced fixation on negative emotions. These benefits have led schools, medical clinics, and mental health professionals to encourage practicing mindfulness.

Practicing Mindfulness

Putting mindfulness into your life is a very simple task, but it's not easy to do. Every day we all go through something whether we know we're going through it or not. Some of us go through things at school, no matter what grade or level, we go through hardships at work, and we certainly can go through things at home. Mindfulness is about being aware of your thoughts, which can then open your mind to aspects you've never thought about for yourself. An expert on mindfulness, Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, has founded the technique mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and teaches about applications of mindfulness meditations in daily activities to reduce stress, pain, and illness. His MBSR is being used in over 720 medical centers, clinics, and hospitals. In an interview with Oprah, Dr. Kabat-Zinn opened up about how we can cultivate mindfulness each day. Some common misconceptions about mindfulness meditation he

mentioned were first, that mindfulness is a concept — this is not true, it is a practice more than a concept, a form of meditation. People typically think that something is supposed to happen when we meditate, but this is also not true. When we meditate, we can choose to close our eyes, we get to choose whether we want to sit cross-legged on the floor or simply sit in your chair at work, or we can stand and meditate just about anywhere. Mindfulness equals awareness, so as long as we are aware of things happening around us when we meditate, that in itself is being mindful. While watching this interview, Kabat-Zinn gave a homework assignment to those watching. The homework was for the next time you take a shower, check to see if you are really in the shower. A lot of us might be in the shower physically, but mentally, we're already in our meeting or we're already in class worrying about a test. So, the next time you're in the shower, make sure you're actually in the shower. Here's the link to the interview if you're interested in Dr. Kabat-Zinn's talk on mindfulness: "Mindfulness in Everyday Life" Jon Kabat Zinn with Oprah Winfrey: <https://youtu.be/D5r2sBQM31k>

Steps to Mindfulness

1. Set aside time:
In order to be successful in practice mindfulness, you must set aside time to practice. Pick a small amount of time each week where you will sit and focus your attention on your breathing and your thoughts. You don't need a mat or calming music, you just need to set aside a few minutes where you will try and relax.
2. Attend to the current moment as it is happening in front of you:
You do not have to quiet your mind or enter a state of pure relaxation. The most important mindfulness skill to practice is awareness and focus. The goal of this is to attend first to your breathing, your body, and the environment around you.
3. Let your thoughts pass by:
Attend to any thoughts, feelings, judgments, worries, and stresses as you have them. Focus on them for a second, then let them pass by and back out of the mind.
4. Return your attention to what is happening around you:
To prevent the mind from getting carried away. Return to the moment whenever you can. Step three tells us to make not of our stress and then let it pass by. To help our judgments pass we can return our awareness to our breathing, body, and surroundings in front of us.
5. Be kind to yourself when your mind wanders:
A wandering mind is completely normal. We will not be able to prevent thoughts from forcing their way into consciousness. Therefore, it is important that we remember to be kind to ourselves. Mindfulness is not meant to make us frustrated. We can accept the thoughts that come and continue to breathe!

Wrapping it Up

“Mindfulness is a gateway into the full dimensionality of being human. (Dr. Kabat-Zinn)” Being mindful, making yourself aware of your body and your thoughts, knowing what you’re feeling and when you’re feeling it, is what makes us human. When we’re not being mindful, chances are we’re missing out on different parts of our lives and our children’s lives. It can be hard to find time every day to set aside for yourself when your world seems to be about everything else. If you can find the time to simply check-in with yourself, attend to your thoughts, it can end up teaching you more about yourself than you thought. Remember to let your other thoughts while meditating pass you by, the fact that you are aware of them and let them go is apart of the meditation. If everyone could practice a little bit of mindfulness each day, the world is sure to be a much kinder place.

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