



Safe Environments

Healthy Workers

## HOW MINDFULNESS WORKS

Mindfulness is a state that involves the self-regulation of attention, allowing you to focus on the present moment and experience thoughts and sensations objectively, with curiosity, openness and acceptance, with the ultimate goal of controlling your reaction to those thoughts and sensations. The more you practice mindfulness, the better it works, and the greater the benefits.

### PRINCIPLES OF GOOD MINDFULNESS PRACTICE:

- Paying attention to the moment-to-moment details of experience
- Paying particular attention to the body and one's experience of it
- Recognizing the experience of mind and not getting caught in memories of the past or plans for the future
- Trying neither too much nor too little
- Letting go of distractions and paying attention to the present moment
- Noticing one's experience without judging it



# HOW MINDFULNESS WORKS

## MEDITATION MATTERS

Meditation is the most popular and empirically researched way to cultivate mindfulness. The trick to meditating is to maintain your attention on current internal and external experiences, keeping a nonjudgmental stance toward random thoughts, sensations, memories or external stimuli. The purpose is not to reject those thoughts and sensations – as some psychotherapies recommend – but just the opposite. The goal is to regulate the way your mind becomes engaged with them and rather than reacting in a habitual way – with fear or anxiety, perhaps – face them non-judgmentally. Ultimately, meditation gives you the ability to regulate your thoughts, emotions and behavior, and process them in a different way, leading to enhanced self-knowledge and control. And the great thing is that anyone can do it.

A common way to gain greater control over thoughts and sensations while meditating is to pay attention to the breath. Think about where the breath is flowing inside the body, the duration and pace of breathing and the breathing pattern. Whenever you encounter a distracting thought, the protocol is to bring yourself back to your breath. There are two types of meditation, which can work together progressively: Concentrative and Receptive.

**Concentrative meditation** involves focusing attention on one thing or idea. It could be your breath or it could be maintaining focus on different body parts. This can lead to **receptive meditation**, which involves not focusing on anything in particular, but being open to whatever thought, sensation or stimuli comes your way. You simply let them pass and not hang on to them, as if you were an outsider objectively observing what is going on. No action or reaction is required. The goal is to remain in the moment.

## CAN I ACHIEVE MINDFULNESS WITHOUT MEDITATION?

Mindfulness is a quality that has been proven to work in a range of settings and can be taught through intentional practice, independent of affiliation with any philosophical system. Although meditation practices are considered particularly useful in reaching a state of mindfulness, it can be cultivated through everyday activities as well, such as yoga, Tai Chi, contemplative prayers, even golfing or swimming. The goal, during whatever activity it is that you are doing, is to pay attention to what is going on in the moment in your body in relation to the environment you're in, connecting your mind and body, and keeping that focus. Pay attention to body sensations, including whether or not your muscles are tensed or relaxed and how your body is positioned in space and in relation to actions – focus on that golf swing!

## BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS

Various research studies have attributed the following benefits to mindfulness:

- Better stress management
- Improved quality of sleep
- Improved the immune function
- Better attentiveness and ability to read sensations
- Better ability to focus
- Improved body awareness
- Interoception: the awareness that gives us the sensation of what's going on inside our body e.g. full bladder
- Emotion regulation
- Better perspective of the self, increased confidence level

As we learn to practice mindfulness and cultivate change in our psyches, the effects transfer externally in terms of our cognitive skills, emotional skills, psychophysiology and brain function. This means better stress management, behavior and social functioning. According to research, these are lasting effects. By practicing mindfulness on a regular basis, new neural connections are being formed in the brain, which means your brain is learning, developing and growing, and that you are on the road to greater well-being – at home, at work, at play – all of which will be in greater balance.

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