

Mindfulness

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a practice of present moment awareness. It means paying attention to our thoughts, emotions, feelings and our bodies in the moment and adopting an attitude of curiosity and compassion. Especially if we are struggling with difficult emotions, low mood or physical pain, we often become judgmental and reactive. Rather than reacting and getting stuck on autopilot, through mindfulness, we develop a skill of stepping into a mode of “being” present with whatever is happening and we therefore can change the way we exist in this world and change the overall experience of our lives.

The History of Mindfulness:

It has been practiced for thousands of years with origins in ancient meditation practices (namely Buddhism), but for the past 40 + years it has been taken up in Western societies thanks to the founder of modern-day mindfulness Jon Kabat-Zinn. At the age of 21 years old, he found a strong calling toward mindfulness, so it was quite early in his career that he founded the Stress Reduction Clinic at The University of Massachusetts Medical School in 1979. Jon Kabat-Zinn developed the Mindfulness Base Stress Reduction program to help with everything from stress to very diverse conditions such as chronic pain, heart disease, anxiety, sleep issues, psoriasis and depression.

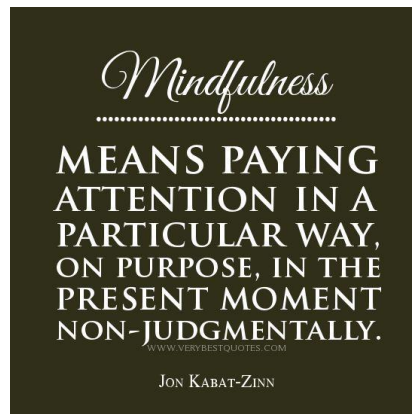
Today there are many mindfulness programs offered which include:

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) developed by Jon Kabat Zinn

Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) developed by therapists Zindel Segal, Mark Williams, and John Teasdale

Mindfulness Based Relapse Prevention (MBRP) developed by Dr Alan Marlatt

Most popular definition:



How Does Mindfulness Work Exactly?

Research shows that when mindfulness is practiced over time, it improves our sense of well-being. Research shows positive changes in the body and brain, including better concentration, improved immune function, and better ability to regulate emotions.

Mindfulness engages parts of the brain that help us to regulate emotions and create a sense of safety and even increase the body's level of oxytocin, the "feel good" hormone.

This happens by helping all parts of the brain work together as an integrated whole. A simple understanding of the brain can help us to understand what happens when we are in distress or feeling overwhelmed, and how we can respond to get these parts of our brain working together again.

The brain has a bias to pick up on negative events, rather than positive or neutral ones. This has helped us survive as a species, but it also creates a lot of stress and suffering if left unchecked.

The best way to get it in check is to regulate the stress response / stress bias by strengthening the noticing part of the brain in the frontal lobes.

We can think of the brain as having 3 main parts, each with different functions.

1.

Frontal Lobes uses verbal language and analytical reasoning. "Thinking Brain"
Problem-solving, language, regulatory abilities, reasoning, memories for events and facts

2.

Limbic System uses the language of emotion. "Mammalian Brain"
Non-verbal, emotional experience, feeling and 'gut' memories

3.

Brainstem uses the language of sensation and impulse survival mode. "Reptilian Brain"

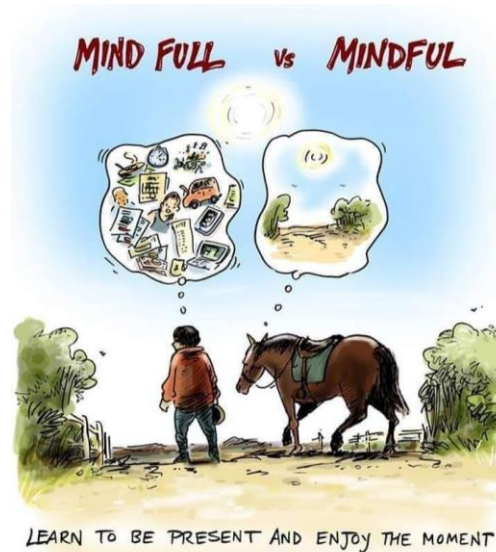
Instinctive responses, heart rate, breathing, body temperature

The more you practice mindfulness, the more your brain will remember to engage all parts of the brain, even during stress. Every time you stop and pay attention, you will be strengthening these integrative neural pathways and you will become conditioned toward a mindful life experience.

Mindfulness teaches us to:

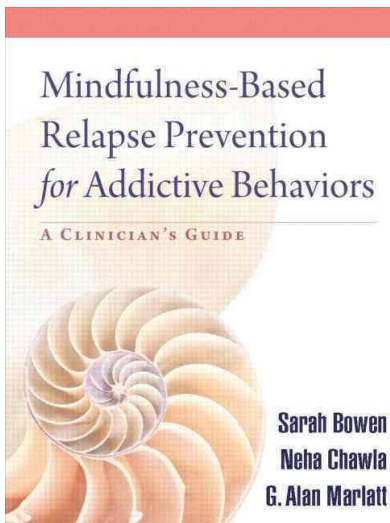
- Be more present and engaged in everyday life, rather than being lost in thoughts about the past or worry about the future
- Step out of autopilot so we can be more purposeful in our day-to-day choices
- Notice our direct experiences (body sensations, emotions, thoughts) – whether they be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral
- Regulate emotions and ride the waves of their intensity
- Learn to respond rather than react to or avoid difficulties
- Relate to ourselves and others with kindness, warmth and compassion

Discussion on what is different about mindfulness verses other forms of meditation and why it is so practical...



What is MBRP?

MBRP = cognitive behavioral therapy + mindfulness meditation + relapse prevention skills



St. Joseph's Health Centre offers a Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention Group. The group was established at SJHC in 2013 and since this time, groups continue to run seasonally (3 times per year). MBRP is open to male and female adults who have already completed some form of initial treatment for their substance use disorder(s).

The groups are each 10 weeks in length and are in closed format. Thursday 1 pm – 3:30 pm 4th floor classroom 10 at SJHC.

Contacts:

Robyn Alexander 416 530 6000 ext.: 3929 robyn.alexander@unityhealth.to

Nadira Hiralal 416 530 6141 ext.: 1 nadira.hiralal@unityhealth.to

Places in the GTA that also offer Mindfulness:

The Centre for Mindfulness Studies, 647-524-6216, info@mindfulnessstudies.com

Debbie Tripp, Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood & Community Health Centre,
dtripp@dpnchc.ca

Benefits specific to MBRP:

Awareness of triggers and how to interrupt habitual interactions/
reactions

Learn to interrupt habitual + automatic behaviour to create
opportunity

Detach from “automatic” thoughts that often lead to relapse

Accept present experience rather than using substances to avoid it

Change one’s relationship with discomfort, decrease need to “fix” the present moment

Support recovery via maintaining a daily mindfulness practice and balanced
lifestyle

MBRP Session Themes

Session 1: Introduction. Establishing group norms.

Awareness. Definitions.

Session 2: Automatic pilot + cravings. J. Kabat-
Zinn movie

Session 3: Presence: Triggers, thoughts, emotions & cravings

Session 5: Mindfulness: Mindfulness in everyday life

Session 5: Mindfulness: Mindfulness in high-risk situations

Session 6: Relapse: Balancing acceptance and change

Session 7: Relapse: Thoughts are not facts

Session 8: How can I best take care of myself?

Session 9: Balanced life: Balanced living and using what has been learned

Session 10: Group closure and Mindful Eating

MBRP EXERCISES & PRACTICES:

*Body Scan

*Mindful Walking

*Mindful Movement

*Sitting Meditations (Auditory, Visual, Breath, Thought, emotions, Body Sensations and combinations of these)

*Mindfulness in Daily Life

***The SOBER Technique**

We teach the 5 stages of the SOBER acronym to tune into ourselves in the moment in order to respond versus react to any variety of situation or emotion

Stop

Observe

Breathe

Expand

Respond

***URGE SURFING**

Using the breath like a surf board to ride the wave of craving, urge or impulse. Riding the wave rather than succumbing to the urge and being wiped by it.

***MINDFUL EATING**

Eating mindfully involves bringing moment-to-moment awareness to our food as we are eating. We fully experience and taste food, when we step out of autopilot mode and into the present. 1. As you eat your food, be as curious as you can to find out as much information about it. Using all of your senses, fully explore your food. a. What colours, textures, patterns, etc. can you see? b. What textures can you notice? Is it crunchy or soft? c. What do you notice about how the food smells? d. Does the food make any sounds as you are eating? 2. Next, place the food in your mouth and roll it around to all sides with your tongue, noticing how it tastes and feels in your mouth. 3. Take a moment to reflect on all that you discovered.



***SELF-KINDNESS & COMPASSION**

Loving kindness is the extension of compassion, caring and friendliness to all beings, including ourselves. Even though it can be most difficult to offer ourselves compassion, it is the most important. We can learn to cultivate self compassion as a resource to maintain emotional balance through meditations that focus on an opening of the heart.

Want more information mindfulness:

How to become a trainer?

University of California San Diego (UCSD)

<https://mbpti.org/programs/mbrp/mbrp-intensive/>

Downloads on some mindfulness meditations and practices

<https://www.mindfulrp.com/>