

# Cultivating Mindfulness to Support Recovery

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## Outline

- What is mindfulness?
- Evidence of its effects on stress, pain, depression, anxiety and recovery from addictions.
- What seems to change/shift as we practice mindfulness?
- Ways to cultivate mindfulness:
  - "Informally"
  - With meditation
- Experiencing cultivating mindfulness, informally & formally -- discussion

## What is Mindfulness?

- "Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally."  
- Jon Kabat-Zinn
- Cultivating mindfulness is training the mind to develop greater awareness of the *present moment*, including current physical sensations, thoughts, and feelings, *without judging one's self or one's experience*.

## Not a new idea

- Almost every world religion (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism) has a strand of thought and practice that proposes that being in the present has value in helping us be better people (e.g., Centering Prayer, Quaker meditation).
- The Greeks, Romans, and the American transcendentalists (Thoreau, Emerson) also made this same point.
- Most recently, Eckhart Tolle, author of best-selling *The Power of Now*, on Oprah Winfrey's show urging us to practice being more present.

## Jon Kabat-Zinn and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) : cultivates mindfulness through meditation, both sitting meditation and mindful movement (easy yoga, walking), and through informal practices (noticing one's present moment experience in ordinary life).
- MBSR is a secular 8-week class, originally developed for coping with severe chronic pain.
- Since its development, many variations have been developed, including a version for depression (MBCT), eating disorders (M-EAT), and relapse prevention (MBRP).

## Mindfulness is not:

- A religion
- A state of bliss
- Automatic pilot
- An empty mind

## A brief summary of research on mindfulness's effects

- Research on mindfulness-based interventions is growing and now includes neuroimaging studies and more sophisticated research designs.
- Effects include:
  - Reductions in depression, anxiety, substance abuse, eating disorders, stress, and pain.
  - Increased immunological response, reduced blood pressure and cortisol
  - Increased psychological well-being and enhanced cognitive functioning.

Holzel, Lazar et al, 2011

## Some specific findings on changes associated with mindfulness meditation

- Statistically significant improvements in ratings of pain & other medical symptoms.
- Patients reported decreases in anxiety and depression.
- Patients with binge eating disorders improved eating patterns & mood.
- Fibromyalgia patients improved.
- Psoriasis cleared faster in patients exposed to recordings of guided mindfulness meditation than those who were not.
- Decreases in substance use both in MBRP & other MB interventions.
- Changes appear to persist.

## What seems to change/shift?

- **Observing** (noticing internal and external stimuli, e.g., as sensations, emotions, cognitions, sights, sounds, and smells)
- **Describing** (mentally labeling these stimuli with words)
- **Acting with awareness** (attending to one's current actions, as opposed to behaving automatically or absentmindedly)
- **Nonjudging** (refraining from evaluating sensations, cognitions, and emotions)
- **Nonreactivity to inner experience** (allowing thoughts and feelings to come and go, without getting caught in them)

Baer et al, 2006

## Some speculation on how mindfulness works

Based on neuroimaging, self-report and behavioral findings, practitioners of mindfulness experience enhanced self-regulation from increased:

- Attention regulation
- Body awareness
- Emotional regulation, including
  - Reappraisal
  - Exposure, extinction, and reconsolidation
- Changes in perspective on one's self
- Compassion toward self & others

Holzel, Lazar et al, 2011

## Ways to cultivate mindfulness

- Meditation
- Informally – being more present in one's ordinary life

## What is meditation?

- "A family of self-regulatory practices that focus on training attention and awareness in order to bring mental processes under greater voluntary control ... (Walsh & Shapiro, Am. Psych., 2006)
- Types of meditation:
  - Concentration
  - Mindfulness
  - Contemplation

**Experiencing Mindfulness  
in this Moment**

Practicing informally – noticing ordinary present  
moment experience.

**Informal Mindfulness:  
examples**

- Eating
- Shower/bath
- Time with loved ones
- Time in nature
- Music
- Driving a car
- Sitting
- Touching water
- Getting out of bed or into bed

**Experiencing Mindfulness  
in this Moment**

Practicing meditation

I REALIZE I'VE ONLY BEEN AT IT FOR 5  
MINUTES, BUT MEDITATION ISN'T BRINGING  
ME THE PEACE OF MIND I WAS PROMISED.

cor.dejaranja.com

**What else you might notice**

- Judgment
- Curiosity about thoughts
- Awareness of impermanence of experience
- Thoughts are just mental events
- Simple awareness

## Why the Breath as an Anchor?

- Always available
- Free
- Accessible -- easily felt
- Connects mind and body, a measure of well-being
- Fairly neutral

## Cultivating Compassion

- Almost always paired with mindfulness practice.
- What is a compassion practice?
- Deliberately cultivating friendliness and kindness toward one's self and toward others.

## Practicing Compassion