

# Cultivating Mindfulness to Support Recovery

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## 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* and without holding on to the experience or pushing it away.

## Experiencing Mindfulness in this Moment

What do you notice? What are you aware of?

## Mindfulness is not a rare or unusual state

- We’ve all experienced moments of mindfulness:
  - Those cold cold days we had in early February.
  - Sitting on a beach, feeling the sun on your face.
  - Walking in a park, noticing what you’re seeing.

## What’s rare is sustained mindfulness.

- Sustained cultivation of mindfulness is associated with a number of mental and physical health benefits.

## Experiencing Mindfulness in this Moment

As we sit here together for the next hour or so, notice, *as best you can*, this present moment. Notice where your attention is, what you’re aware of at this moment and now this moment. And now this moment .....

## The idea that sustained mindfulness is useful is not new.

- The ancient Greeks and Romans talked about it (e.g., Emperor Marcus Aurelius).
- Almost every world religion has a practice that supports being in the present (e.g., Centering Prayer, Quaker meditation, Buddhist Vipassana meditation).
- The American transcendentalists (Thoreau, Emerson) also made this same point.
- Most recently, Eckhart Tolle, author of *The Power of Now*, on Oprah Winfrey’s show.

### Mindfulness is not:

- A religion
- A state of bliss
- A trance state
- Automatic pilot
- An empty mind
- Something to harass yourself about
- A cure for whatever ails you
- A quick fix
- Passivity

### A brief summary of research on mindfulness

- Effects include:
  - **Reductions in depression, anxiety, eating disorders, stress, and pain.**
  - Increased immunological response, reduced blood pressure and **cortisol.**
  - Increased psychological well-being and enhanced cognitive functioning.
  - Fibromyalgia patients improved.
  - **Decreases in substance use.**
  - Changes appear to persist.

### Ideas on how mindfulness works

People who practice mindfulness experience enhanced self-regulation from increases in:

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

Holzel, Lazar et al, 2011

### Not a magic bullet

- Cultivating mindfulness requires patience, practice, and persistence.
- We are training the mind, training our awareness, creating new neural pathways when we practice mindfulness.
- Our default neural pathways are automatic; we're often not aware when they're operating.
- **So repeatedly cultivating awareness and compassion is important in gaining the benefits of mindfulness.**
- JUST NOTICING, over and over, with great patience and *friendliness* toward ourselves and our minds.

### Ways to cultivate mindfulness

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

### Experiencing Mindfulness in this Moment

Practicing informally – noticing ordinary present moment experience.

What are you noticing right now?  
 What are you aware of at this present moment?

### Some ordinary experiences that we can use to practice mindfulness

- Eating
- Showering/bathing
- Brushing your teeth
- Spending time in nature – seeing, hearing, feeling
- Making the bed
- Folding clothes
- Touching water
- Getting into bed

## Meditation

### 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 – focused attention
  - Mindfulness of awareness
  - Contemplation – fostering a positive quality

## Experiencing Mindfulness in this Moment

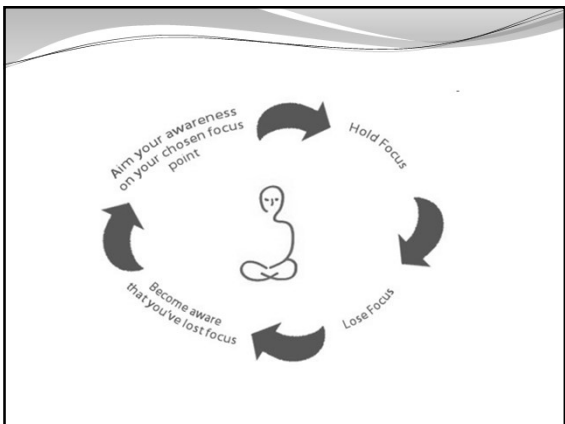
Practicing meditation

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

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### What else you might notice

- Getting hooked by thoughts/feelings
- Pushing away thoughts or feelings
- Judgment
- Curiosity about thoughts
- Awareness of impermanence of experience
- Thoughts are just mental events
- Simple awareness



### Why the Breath as an Anchor?

- Always available in this present moment
- A present-moment physical sensation
- 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

## The Three-minute Breathing space

### What does this have to do with substance use?

Awareness, choice, and compassion:

- Becoming aware of cravings before they hijack us.
- Noticing PHALT sooner (Pain, Hunger, Anger, Loneliness, Tiredness) and choosing more constructive ways to cope with it.
- Choosing to look at things differently.
- Choosing to **not** act on the destructive inclinations that arise.
- **Cultivating compassion toward ourselves**, including our recovery efforts and any failures or lapses.

• If we train ourselves to reach for a snack or pick up the phone to text-message whenever we feel frightened or bored (or angry or sad), this is definitely training. The next time we feel uncomfortable we will also tend to reach for some comfort outside ourselves, eventually establishing a deeply ingrained habit, another brick in the wall of our mental prison.

—Gaylon Ferguson, "Fruitless Labor", Tricycle Magazine

### Changes relevant to recovery with mindfulness practices

• Decreases in:	• Increases in:
• Craving	• Acceptance
• Stress	• Acting with awareness
• Anxiety	• Bodily sensations
• Depression	• Emotional regulation
• PTSD symptoms	• Self and other compassion, connection
• Thought suppression	• Joy
• Pain	• Sense of purpose

### Resources for learning mindfulness

- Local drop-in meditation sessions
- Refuge Recovery meetings
- Classes offered by Ann Arbor Center for Mindfulness
- Local Buddhist groups
- On-line guided and unguided meditations & instructions
- Books

### Practice, practice, practice

Five minutes a day or 20.  
Do a practice that you like.  
Weave your parachute every day,  
so your ability to be present is there  
when you need it.  
Remember that you are creating  
new neural pathways every time you notice  
this moment.

