

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness means paying attention to the present moment in a particular way: on purpose and without judgment. So much of our lives is spent thinking about the past or planning for the future that we miss what is happening in the here-and-now. We live our lives on automatic pilot—not really being aware of what we are thinking, feeling, or doing. Diminished awareness of the present moment severely limits the ability to live to the fullest and to respond to situations with choice rather than reacting automatically. Mindfulness is about living consciously and can be cultivated through meditation, yoga, and other mind-body practices. These practices help us access powerful inner resources for coping effectively with stress and difficulties.

Mindfulness is a way of learning to relate directly to whatever is happening in your life, a way of taking charge of your life, a way of doing something for yourself that no one else can do for you — consciously and systematically working with your own stress, pain, illness, and the challenges and demands of everyday life. In contrast, you've probably encountered moments of "mindlessness" — a loss of awareness resulting in forgetfulness, separation from self, and a sense of living mechanically. Restoring within yourself a balanced sense of health and well being requires **increased awareness** of all aspects of self, including body and mind, heart and soul. Mindfulness-based stress reduction is intended to ignite this inner capacity and infuse your life with awareness. Fortunately, mindfulness is not something that you have to "get" or acquire. It is already within you — a deep internal resource available and patiently waiting to be released and used in the service of learning, growing, and healing.

How has mindfulness been used?

Mindfulness has been used with groups as diverse as corporate employees, CEOs, educators, students (grade school through college and professional schools such as law, medicine, and nursing), attorneys, judges, correctional staff, prison inmates, health care professionals, members of the clergy, and Olympic and professional athletes - including the world champion Chicago Bulls and Los Angeles Lakers basketball teams. Mindfulness is used as the basis for the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Programs that were founded in 1979 at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn. Since then, numerous hospitals and private practitioners across the country have begun to offer Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Programs.

What are the benefits of mindfulness?

Incorporating mindfulness into your life can produce a number of benefits. People have reported an increased ability to relax, improved concentration and creativity, greater energy and enthusiasm for life, greater self-awareness and understanding of others, improved self-esteem, better work performance, and an ability to cope more effectively with stress. Mindfulness has also been shown to be effective at decreasing numerous psychological symptoms and physical symptoms associated with stress. Research has shown that people using mindfulness techniques report reduced symptoms of depression, anxiety, and chronic pain as well as improved immune system function.

References:

<http://www.amazon.com/Mindfulness-Based-Stress-Reduction-Workbook/dp/1572247088>
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