

BE.HERE.NOW

Mindfulness is a habit, it's something the more one does, the more likely one is to be in that mode with less and less effort... it's a skill that can be learned. It's accessing something we already have. Mindfulness is not difficult. What's difficult to remember is to be Mindful

—John Teasdale, Cooriginator of MBCT (Rock, 2009)¹

Mindfulness is a moment to moment psychological awareness of one's experience without judgement. It is a state and not a trait.² No doubt that it can be enhanced by certain practices and activities such as meditation, yoga, tai chi, quigong, but it is not synonymous to them. It is a self regulatory practice that makes one attend to or focus on the mental processes intentionally and voluntarily. Infact, it is familiarizing you with what it feels like to be mindful and getting better day by day at remembering to be mindful. Originally associated with Buddhist psychology, the term 'mindfulness' comes from the Sanskrit word "smriti" which literally means that which is remembered.³ Largely credited to the work of Dr Jon Kabat-Zinn⁴ founder of Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts, while treating patients with chronic pain, stress-related illnesses, cancer patients during palliative care and high strung business executives.

Those who do not have time to meditate, in fact, really need to meditate the most. In today's fast paced world, remember, that only 10 minutes of practice a day, means a lot. Some of the common problems expressed by people are: I cannot stop thinking, I feel too restless to be mindful, I feel too tired to be mindful and dealing with uncomfortable emotions. Mindful meditation promotes meta-cognitive awareness, decreases rumination and breaks off the monotony of constant thinking and cognitive preoccupations. On the positive side it enhances attention and improves memory. Once you are increasing your awareness, you are actually using your working memory and by that you do not let your functions (faculties) deteriorate and practice on them. Mindfulness is done purposefully; it is an effort that calls for focusing on certain functions that we may not be aware of. You can say we can try to direct our attention rather than letting it go haywire. Being in the present moment is another key feature and realizing it to be as such. Along with this comes an element of acceptance. Being nonjudgemental about our emotions, thoughts, sensations, as being good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, constructive or destructive.

To learn how to practice mindfulness, one has to focus on one of the senses which allow you to be in the present moment. Then anchor on to your object of attention. This may be the breath, e.g. feel your breath entering your body and leaving it when you inhale and exhale. You do get diverted in the process but return to the focus as soon as you get distracted. Initially it happens often but gradually you are able to focus for longer time by filtering unwanted thoughts.

Learning to be mindful is an intentional effort that can keep the stress away and improve your physical and psychological health. It can be incorporated in your daily life and needs no instruments or gadgets. One can practice it anywhere anytime. The beauty of a mindfulness approach is that it is eminently adaptable to a wide array of circumstances. It can be mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindful moments, mindful at work place, etc.

The general understanding is that the only certainty in life is change. Slowing down and seeing things as they are, without blinders and learning ways to hold on to the strong emotions and sensations that arise can be a way to change. Hence change occurs not only through training the mind in informal meditation practice, but via a shift in attitude, mindset and perspective that allows people to see things in a totally different light.

You can begin the day at workplace with mindful moments. This does not require practice or training. It is just being open to or ready to be aware of pleasant mindful moments. Being 'in the moment' or 'mindful of the moment' can enhance pleasant experiences. To start with you can take a moment to reflect on some pleasant moments that might happen during the day. As you recall those, remember to try the physical feelings associated with them. Stay with that memory for a few seconds and feel it sinking in. Your experience becomes deeper and richer as you allow yourself to absorb it and soak in it.

Mindfulness is a mind-body practice that brings about psychological change in thoughts, feelings and sensations in the present moment. It switches you from being hooked on to the autopilot button and take intentional decisions and be more aware and more alert.

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References

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