



TAKECHARGE

WELCOA'S SELF-CARE BULLETIN

THE BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS

Practical Ways You Can Incorporate It into Your Life

In recent years, mindfulness has become a household term and programs are now commonly found in schools, workplaces, and hospitals. Mindfulness, the act of concentrating on the present, has its roots in Buddhist meditation. Meditation is a practice that aims to increase awareness of the mind and concentration.

HEALTH BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS

Studies suggest that focusing on the present can have a positive impact on health and well-being. Mindfulness-based treatments have been shown to reduce anxiety and depression. There's also evidence that mindfulness can help lower blood pressure and improve sleep. It may even help people cope with pain.

One of the first mindfulness-based therapies was used for depression. Mindfulness appears to help with depression in two ways. First, it helps develop the ability to stay grounded in the present. With depression, attention can easily get diverted into the past or future which leads to focusing on past negative experiences or worrying about things to come.

Second, mindfulness can help you “de-center” from such thoughts. It's like being able to sit on the riverbank and watch thoughts floating by like leaves on a stream. Developing the skill of mindfulness can help stop you



from being pulled into any one thought and carried down the stream. People often experience thoughts like, “nothing ever works out for me,” or “it's always going to be this way.” Over time, and with practice, you can develop the ability to stand back from these painful thought patterns.

HOW TO PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

One way to practice mindfulness is a sitting meditation that's practiced in a quiet space. In this practice, you focus on your breathing or sensations in your body. If your mind wanders—like thoughts popping in about things you need to do—you try to return your mind to the present moment. But mindfulness doesn't have to be done sitting still or in silence. You can integrate the practice into things you do every day, like walking or eating.

Paying closer attention to your body and how you feel when eating can help you notice signals that you're full and help you better enjoy your food, leading to healthier

habits. For example, if you've just eaten a donut, you may be more likely to notice an unpleasant sugar crash. Remembering this can help you to make better food choices in the future.

If you want to practice mindfulness, there are many online programs and apps available, but they're not all created equal. Experts suggest looking for evidence-based resources from medical schools and universities.

TIPS & TRICKS

Becoming more mindful requires practice. Here are some tips to help you get started:

- » Take some deep breaths. Breathe in through your nose to a count of 4, hold for 1 second, and then exhale through the mouth to a count of 5. Repeat often.
- » Enjoy a stroll. As you walk, pay attention to your breath and the sights and sounds around you. If thoughts and worries enter your mind, note them but then return to the present.
- » Practice mindful eating. Be aware of the taste, textures, and flavors in each bite. Listen to when your body is hungry and full.
- » Do a body scan. Bring your attention to how each part of your body is feeling. This can help you connect with your body.
- » Utilize mindfulness resources including online programs and teacher-guided practices.

