Introduction to Mindfulness

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What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to things as they are.

Williams, Teasdale, Segal, and Kabat-Zinn (2007)
Definition of mindfulness

- It is an active process; it involves active attention which leads to awareness
- The emphasis is on the present, rather than the past or the future
- As best one can the attention should be non-judgmental and accepting
Mindfulness meditation is not

- Esoteric, new age or spiritual
- Just another relaxation technique
- Positive thinking
- Going into an altered state
- Trying to clear your mind of thoughts
Mindfulness interventions

• Strong evidence-base – over 30 years of research
• Over 600 trials have demonstrated effectiveness of mindfulness in a wide range of circumstances
• A NICE recommended treatment for preventing recurrence of depression, the management of severe pain and chronic illness
• A powerful means for enhancing wellbeing
Considerable research shows neurological benefits of mindfulness e.g.

- Changes in areas of brain associated with decision-making, attention and empathy in people who regularly practice mindfulness
- Meditation increases the area of the brain linked to regulating emotion, improves people’s attention, job performance, productivity and satisfaction
EXERCISE
Ancient roots, modern applications

- Western Mindfulness-based approaches based on combination of traditional Buddhist meditation techniques/psychological models of mental health

- Adapted to secular 8-week stress reduction programme (MBSR) by Jon Kabat-Zinn in 1979 for patients with array of physical/medical difficulties not helped by conventional medicine
Mindfulness based cognitive therapy

• Teasdale, Segal and Williams (1995) adapted MBSR to create MBCT: a group based, relapse prevention programme for people with history of recurrent depression (Segal et al, 2002)

• Combines systematic mindfulness training—meditation exercises targeted at enhancing awareness and developing self compassion—with elements from (CBT) (Kuyken et al, 2012)
The Mindful Way through Depression
Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness

Mark Williams, John Teasdale, Zindel Segal, and Jon Kabat-Zinn
Experiential and practice based

• Mindfulness is essentially experiential – we practise it
• Intellectual v. experiential / knowing v. doing
  • How do we teach people to ride a bike?
• Formal practice – meditation e.g. bodyscan, breath and body, sitting practice
• Informal practice – awareness of body sensations, thoughts, emotions and sensory input during daily life. Practised in ordinary activities like eating, washing, brushing teeth
Simple but not easy

• To truly understand mindfulness requires more than just acquiring the skills and knowledge

• Compared to other yogic and other meditative traditions mindfulness is unique in that it requires experience through ongoing personal engagement in the practice (Kabat-Zinn 2011)
Why Be Mindful?
Our most valuable resource ...

• The mind is our most valuable and precious resource through which we experience every single moment of our life

• We rely on the mind to be happy, content and emotionally stable as individuals

• The same mind we depend upon to be focused, spontaneous, creative, and to perform at our very best in everything we do
Our most valuable resource ...

• Yet we spend little time taking care of it

• We spend more time maintaining our car, our clothes and our hair than we do our mind

Andy Puddicombe Founder of Headspace
Eight week MBCT course outline

• Session 1: Awareness and automatic pilot
• Session 2: Living in our heads
• Session 3: Gathering the scattered mind
• Session 4: Recognizing aversion
• Session 5: Allowing/letting Be
• Session 6: Thoughts are not facts
• Session 7: How can I best take care of myself
• Session 8: Maintaining and extending new learning
Core learning

- Past or Future vs. Present
- Conceptual vs. Embodied
- Autopilot/Habit vs. Intentionality
- Reacting vs. Responding
- Thoughts as facts vs. Thoughts as mental events
Foundations of mindfulness practice

• The 7 attitudinal factors that constitute the major pillars of mindfulness practice
  • Non-judging
  • Patience
  • Beginners Mind
  • Trust
  • Non-Striving
  • Acceptance
  • Allowing/Letting be or non-attachment

Mindful living

• Increased awareness – recognising the “automatic pilot“ – the tendency for our minds to be more frequently in the past/future than with our experience in this moment

• Placing our attention where we want it to be, and...

• Developing a new relationship with our experience

• Being mind rather than Doing mind – making space for and turning towards rather than resisting or working to change experiences we don’t like

• Responding to experience based on awareness of what’s actually here rather than habitually reacting

Sarah Silverton Bangor University
EXERCISE
Who benefits from mindfulness?

• Best suited to people interested in a psychosocial approach

• Those open and willing to learn new ways of thinking and behaving and to learn within a group based context

• Those who can invest the time both to attend the weekly sessions and to do the daily home practice
Mindfulness resources

- Oxford Mindfulness Centre: MBCT Courses and Info
  - http://oxfordmindfulness.org
- Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice University of Wales: General info on mindfulness
  - www.bangor.ac.uk/mindfulness
- Counselling Oxford: MBCT Courses
  - www.counsellingoxford.com
- Mindfulnessworks: MBSR Courses
  - http://www.mindfulnessworks.co.uk/
Five tips for mindful living

1. When you wake in the morning start the day by focussing your attention on your breathing: observe five mindful breaths; sense the effects of breathing throughout your body
2. When possible, do just one thing at a time. Pay full attention to what you are doing. When the mind wanders from what you are doing, bring it back.

Repeat this step several billion times
3. Notice your body while you walk or stand. Take a moment to notice your posture. Pay attention to the contact of the ground under your feet. Feel the air on your face, arms, and legs as you walk.
4. Whenever you are about to eat or drink something, pause and breathe. Pay attention as you eat. Bring awareness to seeing, smelling, tasting, chewing, and swallowing your food.
5. Before you go to sleep at night, take a few minutes and bring your attention to your breathing

Observe five mindful breaths
QUESTIONS