

## Practicing Mindfulness

With technology and media at our fingertips at all times, jam-packed schedules, long to-do lists, and worried thoughts about all of life's pressures, it's no wonder that some researchers say American stress is at an all-time high. How we relate to stress, or at least what we choose to put our attention on, may be part of both the problem and the solution. Many of us spend a lot of our time and attention focusing on worrying about the future or reliving things that happened in the past, but how much attention do we give to the present moment – the only moment we have influence over?

### What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a practice that can help anyone increase their awareness to the present moment, and has all sorts of benefits including decreasing stress and improving our quality of life.

Mindfulness is the practice of our ability to put our awareness fully into this moment. One famous mindfulness proponent named Jon Kabat-Zinn says, "Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally." Many people think mindfulness is the same as meditation, but mindfulness is a state of awareness while meditation is the practice or act of focusing your awareness or attention. So mindfulness is a form of meditation, but there are other styles of meditation such as spiritual meditation or yoga meditation and more.

### The Benefits of Mindfulness

We know that when we train our brains to be mindful we can be less reactive to life stressors

and less consumed or overwhelmed by that stress. In fact, research has shown that mindfulness reduces the body's cortisol (stress hormone) levels, and can reduce anxiety and depression. There are many other benefits to practicing mindfulness. Science has shown that mindfulness can improve impulse-control, improve sleep, boost focus and working memory, lower our heart rates and improve immune system functioning, improve mood and feelings of connection, and it has even been shown to help with chronic pain.

#### **Mindful Breathing:**

- Sit upright and bring your attention to your breath – the inhale and the exhale.
- When your attention wanders, which it will, simply bring your attention back to your breath.

You can do this exercise for even a few minutes during a quick break, or as part of a regular daily routine

Try to practice mindfulness for 20 minutes every day.

#### **How do I Practice Mindfulness**

Practicing mindfulness is something anyone can do practically anywhere and anytime. Mindful breathing is just one example of how to practice mindfulness, but there are lots of ways to practice, and you don't need anything fancy to practice mindfulness, just practice

placing your awareness on whatever the present moment is, whether it's awareness when washing dishes, or when drinking a cup of coffee or tea, or while taking a walk outside. There are several tools to help you with mindfulness practice, such as guided mindfulness exercises or meditations accessible on the internet, or through apps for your phone or even a mindfulness retreat or class. Mindfulness is a practice that anyone can do, does not have to cost a thing, and has loads of scientifically backed benefits. So try it – it could change your life!