

A Simple Mindfulness Practice Can Improve Mental Health

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Depression, anxiety, and related mental distress are rising at alarming rates in the U.S. Mental distress can come from thinking too much about the past, continuing to play back events that have already happened, or worrying about the future and focusing on “what ifs.” Staying mindful of the present helps boost your positive emotions and allows you to be more engaged in daily activities. Mindfulness practices have been a large part of the Buddhist tradition for over 2,000 years and have recently become so popular in the U.S. that some medical professionals are turning to them to help their patients.¹

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness - “awareness and nonjudgmental acceptance of your moment-to-moment experiences” - is made up of two parts: (1) the ability to focus on what is happening right now and (2) the ability to experience an event fully, without worrying or over-thinking.¹ The prefrontal cortex of the brain controls a person’s ability to regulate emotions, make decisions, think critically, plan, and more. This section of the brain gets stronger with a regular mindfulness practice, along with our ability to control our responses and emotions, while our instinctive emotional reactions become less frequent.

What are the Benefits of Mindfulness?

There are many benefits to practicing mindfulness, including lower blood pressure and greater life satisfaction, agreeableness, conscientiousness, vitality, self-esteem, empathy, competence, optimism, positive emotions, and overall psychological wellbeing. Mindfulness is also

thought to reduce how often a person has automatic negative thoughts and increases the ability to let go of those negative thoughts. People who regularly practice mindfulness report less depression, neuroticism, absent mindedness, disconnection, social anxiety, and trouble with emotions.¹

How to be Mindful

Mindfulness involves keeping your attention in the present moment and switching your attention back to the present moment whenever it wanders. Mindful meditation is a popular mindfulness practice that involves paying attention to your breathing as you breathe in and out. Areas of the brain that affect attention become stronger, helping you to increase your focus and become less distracted by negative events and emotions. The longer a person practices mindfulness, the more benefits they experience, but it does not take a lot of training to start seeing these benefits. A simple mindfulness training can have instant positive results. Even without formal training, anyone can benefit from practicing mindfulness. To learn more, visit [The Greater Good Science Center](#).

Reference

1. Keng S.L., Smoski, M.J., & Robins, C.J. (2011). Effects of mindfulness on psychological health: A review of empirical studies. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 31(6).
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The mission of the Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion at Syracuse University is to improve population health through applied research and evaluation, education, engaged service, and advocating for evidence-based policy and practice change.