Stress management: mindfulness.

RelayClinical Education. Feb 2012 v2012 i1 pNA.

Full Text: COPYRIGHT 2012 McKesson Health Solutions LLC

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the practice of being aware and alert in the present moment, without judging. You focus only on the now, and do not think of the past or future. Mindfulness is a helpful technique for dealing with stress, tension, anxiety, and pain. It can be done at any time. It helps in several ways:

* It helps you to relax. The more you practice mindfulness, the less stress you feel. It can also help you sleep better.

* It can take your mind off what is bothering you. While you observe your thoughts and notice what your body is feeling, you think less about other things.

* Over time, mindfulness can help you be aware of automatic responses and habits. When you are conscious of these habits and responses, you can more easily change those that you no longer want.

How is it done?

To start learning mindfulness, set aside 10 to 20 minutes in a quiet place with few distractions. At first, it helps to practice in the same place and at the same time each day.

You could sit in a comfortable position, or you could take a walk. If you are sitting, sit up straight, with your feet on the ground, and your body well supported, so you can completely relax.

Next, just focus on your breath. You don't have to breathe deeply, just breathe naturally. Pay attention to the feeling of breathing. Notice the air moving in and out of your nostrils. Notice the feeling of your lungs filling and emptying. Simply follow the movement and rhythm of your breath.

Tune into parts of the body that feel tense or painful, such as your jaws, neck, shoulders, or legs. As you notice tension or pain, name it, accept it, and add it to your focus as you breathe. For example: "I breathe in and I feel pain in my knee; I breathe out, and I accept the pain." Also notice the parts of the body that are not tense or in pain.

Notice sounds in your environment: You might hear a bird, traffic, a furnace or fan. You might notice smells such as plants, food, or rain. As you notice things, name them, accept them as they
are, and add them to your focus as you breathe. For example: "I breathe in and I hear a dog barking; I breathe out, and I accept the sound. I breathe in and I smell flowers nearby; I breathe out and I accept the smell."

As you notice feelings and thoughts passing through your mind, name and accept those too, and return your focus to your breathing. Don't fight the thoughts or feelings, or try to deal with them. Observe your thoughts, rather than letting them take over. Just name them and breathe. For example: "I breathe in, and I notice that I feel nervous; I breathe out, and accept that feeling. I breathe in, and I think about my doctor's appointment tomorrow; I breathe out, and I accept that thought."

Sometimes people believe that they are defined by their emotions. For example, "I am an angry person" or "I am a depressed person". Moods and feelings are temporary. They do not define the person. Through mindfulness, you notice that you feel certain emotions in one part of your body. For example, you may feel anger in your stomach, neck, or hands. Once you name what you feel and accept it, the emotion does not control you. You can focus on other things in the present moment.

Any time you notice your attention turning to stressful thoughts, shift your attention back to what is happening right now. You will notice your mind quieting, and the thoughts becoming less stressful. Simply by focusing on your breathing, you may notice that your body feels more relaxed. This is helpful for both physical and emotional health.

At the end of your 10 to 20 minute practice, take a deep breath. Notice what is happening around you, and allow yourself to focus on your daily life.

At first, practice mindfulness as meditation. After a while, you will find that you can focus better when you choose to, and react to things more calmly. You can also be more mindful when you garden, clean house, or do other activities. Mindfulness helps decrease the stress in your life, and helps you feel able to deal with whatever life hands you.

Developed by RelayHealth.

Published by RelayHealth.

Last modified: 2009-08-13

Last reviewed: 2010-06-14

Record Number: A281567420