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Exploring Stress and Pain Through the Lens of Mindfulness

“Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional.” –Haruki Murakami
S.T.O.P.
MBSR

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction created by Jon Kabat-Zinn in 1979.

First implemented at UMASS Medical School as a “stress-reduction clinic.”

Patient-centered educational approach which uses intensive training in mindfulness meditation.

Intention of the program is to help people learn how to take better care of themselves and live healthier and more adaptive lives.

The MBSR curriculum became the standard for most research done on the benefits of mindfulness, one of several mindfulness interventions.

Courses offered worldwide in medical and non-medical settings.
Formal Mindfulness Practice

Intentionally setting aside time to “be,” to strengthen our capacity to be present for extended periods of time and to learn to relate to our experience directly and non-judgmentally.
Informal Mindfulness Practice

In all that we do, we can bring the quality of mindfulness awareness.
MBCPM

MBSR the foundation for other pain management interventions, specifically Mindfulness Based Chronic Pain Management
Mindfulness: Some Definitions

“The awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience.”

-Jon Kabat-Zinn
Mindfulness: Some Definitions

“Three skills working together: concentration power, sensory clarity, equanimity.” – Shinzen Young

“Mindfulness means maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment.” – Greater Good Science
Why Pay Attention?
“A human mind is a wandering mind, and a wandering mind is an unhappy mind. The ability to think about what is not happening is a cognitive achievement that comes at an emotional cost.” Harvard psychologists Matthew Killingsworth, Daniel Gilbert
How to pay attention

Not as easy as we think:

We get caught up in and resist our present moment experience

AND

We are naturally driven to distraction/avoidance.

“The human condition:  lost in thought.” – Eckhart Tolle
Default Mode Network

Unless consciously engaged, our minds wander aimlessly.

An Overactive Default Mode Network

Unhappiness

Anxiety

Attentional Lapse

Can’t turn your mind off

Based on study by Brewer et al 2011
# Mindful or Mindless?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intentional</th>
<th>Automatic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Directly Experiencing</td>
<td>Thinking About…</td>
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<td>Curious and Accepting</td>
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<td>Observing and Allowing</td>
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<td>Focusing on the Task</td>
<td>Rushing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clarifying What You Feel</td>
<td>Clouding Emotion</td>
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Mindful or Mindless?

Your body is present. Is your mind?

Past  Present  Future

Doug Neill
Awareness of Breath Practice

Settling in the body and opening to whatever arises in our field of awareness without judgment. No fixing. Just gentle curiosity. Noticing when attention wanders away and guiding it back to the present. Allowing the waves of experience to come and go.
Awareness

“Awareness is the critical element in learning how to free yourself from your stress reactions at those moments when your first impulse is to feel threatened and to run or take some other kind of evasive action or to fight.”

Jon Kabat-Zinn, Full Catastrophe Living
Mindfulness and Stress

DISATTENTION -> DISCONNECTION -> DISREGULATION -> DISORDER -> DISEASE.
Pain Is Stressful. (Period.)

“Pain is not just a ‘body’ problem, it’s a whole systems problem.”

-Jon Kabat-Zinn
“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

“When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.”

-Viktor E. Frankyl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*
There Is a Space...
Healing our Relationship to Our Pain

“What we are talking about is really befriending your experience at the level of the body and at the level of the mind and heart, and seeing what unfolds.”

“How you relate to life itself, unfolding moment by moment, however pleasant or unpleasant it may be in any moment, especially if you have a chronic pain condition, becomes the real meditation practice.”

Jon Kabat-Zinn
Is Pain “Workable”?  

PAIN × RESISTANCE = SUFFERING – Shinzen Young

“The key point: it is possible to register and then investigate and transform your relationship to whatever you are sensing at a given place in the body, even if it is highly unpleasant.”

– Daniel Goleman and Richard Davidson
Mindful Response to Pain

✧ Disrupting habitual reactive habits
✧ Staying in relationship to experience, even the unpleasant
✧ Trusting that we have a choice in how we respond
✧ Choosing skillful/most appropriate response
✧ Listening to the messages of the body
✧ Detecting early signs of distress is possible
✧ Understanding what pain is versus what are thoughts about pain and emotions related to pain
The Body Scan
Finding the Right Resources

Meditation is not to escape from society, but to come back to ourselves and see what is going on. Once there is seeing, there must be acting. With mindfulness, we know what to do and what not to do to help.”

-Thich Nhat Hanh
Mindfulness Brings A Quality To All Other Interventions

- Patient/Healthcare Provider Relationship
- Nutrition
- Exercise
- Breath Work
- Acupuncture
- Massage
- Family Counseling
- Group Therapy
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Biofeedback
Science Validates Benefits of Mindfulness Practices

- The American Mindfulness Research Association (AMRA) was founded in 2013.
- Center for Healthy Minds, University of Wisconsin-Madison
- Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Healthcare, and Society, UMASS Medical School
- Osher Center for Integrative Medicine, Vanderbilt University
- Mindfulness and Research Center, UCLA
- The Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education, Stanford Medicine
- Mayo Clinic Health System
Increased Interest in Measuring Effectiveness of Mindfulness
“Mindfulness Meditation Trumps Placebo in Pain Reduction”

Key findings from 2015 study from Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center:

- Participants who practiced mindfulness meditation reported greater pain relief than placebo.
- Brain scans showed that mindfulness meditation produced different patterns of activity than those produced by placebo to reduce pain.
- Mindfulness meditation group reported that pain intensity was reduced by 27 percent and by 44 percent for the emotional aspect of pain. (Placebo cream reduced sensation of pain by 11% and emotional aspect of pain by 13%).
- Mindfulness meditation reduced pain by activating brain regions associated with self-control of pain.
- Thalamus deactivated during mindfulness meditation.
- As little as four 20-minute daily sessions of mindfulness meditation could enhance pain treatment in a clinical setting. (Spoiler alert: study examined healthy, pain-free volunteers, so we cannot generalize these findings to chronic pain patients at this time.)
Resources

- *The Mindfulness Solution To Pain* by Dr. Jackie Gardner-Nix

- *You Are Not Your Pain: Using Mindfulness to Relieve Pain, Reduce Stress, and Restore Well-Being – An Eight-Week Program* by Vidyamala Burch and Danny Penman

- Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society: [www.umassmed.edu/cfm](http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm)

- Mindfulness Utah/MBSR Utah: [www.mindfulnessutah.com](http://www.mindfulnessutah.com)

- American Mindfulness Research Association and Mindfulness Research Monthly: [http://goamra.org](http://goamra.org)
Questions, Comments, Insights