

Mindfulness: a Tool for Increasing Happiness and Reducing Stress in Recovery

Posted on [May 17, 2017](#) in the Chopra Addiction and Wellness Center Newsletter



Mindfulness is the practice of fully immersing yourself in the present moment, without thoughts about the future or the past. It encourages you to direct your attention inwards, and consciously experience the feelings, thoughts and sensations that are happening right now. This is how mindfulness can promote stress relief and acceptance, and pull you away from the destructive thought patterns that may tempt you to use a behavior or substance to numb discomfort.

Being mindful in each moment can translate to more fulfillment, peace and enjoyment in your everyday life.

How Mindfulness Can Soften the Hardships of Recovery

1. Mindfulness Reduces Emotional Cravings

Addictive behaviours are used as coping mechanisms to numb painful or uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. When faced with these thoughts, cravings can manifest as a protective mechanism— an emotional and mental escape.

Mindfulness encourages you to stay attuned with your present state of being, instead of running, covering or trying to escape these feelings. In essence, mindfulness is the opposite state of addiction. Through the process of awareness, you learn to accept and potentially transform these feelings and allow them to pass, which is the only way to heal and move on from them.

2. Mindfulness Encourages You to Pause Before You React

You cannot always control what happens to you, but you can learn to control how you respond to life's circumstances. When you ground yourself in the present moment by being mindful, it's easier to pause and process a certain situation or feeling in a healthy way. Over time, this can actually change how your brain responds to emotional stress, which results in less anxiety and negative emotion over time.

For example, let's say that when thoughts arise about the relationship you have with your mother, they instantly trigger you to crave a drink. But when you practice having awareness in the present moment, you'll notice that you learn to pause before reacting to a specific thought pattern— and instead, become aware of the emotion you're feeling.

When you allow yourself to *feel*, sit with, and recognize this emotion— rather than avoid it— the craving has a chance to pass and you can move on with your day. The more you practice this form of mindfulness, the less strong and intense your cravings will become, until they eventually disappear.

3. Mindfulness Can Help Transcend Pain and Suffering

The desire to retreat from negativity is normal. Nobody wants to remain in a suspended state of suffering. And according to Buddhist views, pain and suffering are an essential part of life.

We have the opportunity to transcend our pain by accepting this truth, and recognizing that our suffering is determined by how we respond to it. Mindfulness brings awareness to the present moment, where we can realize and accept that everything is exactly as it should be: our pain can be used to fulfill our highest potential.

Putting Mindfulness into Action

The wonderful thing about mindfulness is that no specialized equipment or training is required. You can practice it right now. All you need to do is take a quiet moment to connect with your breath. Inhale and exhale to observe all that is going on in your mind and body. Focusing on your breathe anchors you to the present moment, and helps eliminate distractions of the past and future.

What Does Mindfulness Look and Feel Like?

When enjoying your next morning cup of tea, practice wrapping your hands around your mug. Feel the sensation of the hot mug against your fingertips, smell the fragrant leaves and observe the steam rising from your cup. Feel the calming sensations that ripple throughout your body when you take a long sip of your tea.

Where are you in *this* moment? How do you feel right now? What thoughts are arising in you? Be present and stay with this moment, and simply observe how you feel. Remember that you are exactly where you need to be, and nowhere else.

Mindfulness Meditation

You can also practice mindfulness through meditation, which may allow it to become second nature easier in your everyday life. By closing your eyes and focusing your attention on your breath, feel the air flow through you as you inhale and exhale. Allow your mind to slow down, and avoid judging or responding to thoughts as they arise, simply observe them and allow them to pass, imagining they're like floating clouds in the sky.

This conscious practice, when done for just a few minutes per day, can increase the acceptance and satisfaction in your everyday life.

As you can see, mindfulness is a powerful tool to harness your thoughts and emotions (and how you respond to them) during recovery and any time through your life. By practicing mindfulness and remaining in the present moment as often as possible, you'll be able to manage your stress levels easier, and heal any emotional trauma that's been holding you back from living a fulfilling life, and may have been too uncomfortable to face and overcome in the past.