Mindfulness in Medicine - What is It?

The practice of mindfulness has roots in the meditative practices of mainly Eastern religious traditions though the mindfulness sessions PHP offers is a pragmatic approach for health care professionals. Mindfulness is simply paying attention on purpose in the present moment in a non-judgemental way during everyday activities.¹

The essence of mindfulness is being able to attend to the experience at hand, such as a clinical encounter, without hastily making judgments or being reactive in a manner that would interfere with or compromise our capacity to understand and act skilfully. Clinical excellence does not exist in social emotional vacuum. Mindfulness is the moment, the intersection, where clinical abilities meet social-emotional intelligence.

Mindfulness is a promising health promoting practice according to an increasing number of scientific studies. The emerging neuroscientific and biobehavioural research is confirming the interdependence of cognition, emotion, social behaviour, competency under stress and wellbeing.²

Dr. Krasner and his colleagues at University of Rochester Medical School in their mindfulness research describe four qualities of exemplary health professionals: attentive observation, critical curiosity, informed flexibility – the ability to match the appropriate response to the situation at hand and presence. Mindfulness is strongly associated with strengthening each of these four attributes. Mindfulness is simple as learning the ABCs (awareness - attention, being with the challenges in front of you and being with your own feelings and thoughts on the inside and choosing wisely, skilfully, compassionately on the next right step). With practice mindfulness offers a lifetime of fostering a more meaningful narrative, connection and wellbeing in your life.

How can mindfulness be enhanced?
- Regular formal mindfulness meditation practice
- Engaging mindfully in our daily life through
  - Non-meditation practices that promote mind-body awareness through hobbies, sports, yoga, tai chi, Pilates, music, dance
  - Mindful attention we can give to daily routines or habits by becoming aware of the moments we have switched into an 'autopilot' mode in our life
  - Mindful communication including the attention we bring to talking and listening

Rationale for Promoting Mindfulness
- To improve the quality of care, reduce burnout and promote professional well-being by:
  - Increasing awareness of the affective, cognitive and social factors that contribute to medical errors.
  - Increasing the capacity to regulate one's own reactivity to challenging situations
  - Communicating mindfully to reduce the risk of misunderstandings, such as being open to new information and acknowledging the contributions of team members

² Two websites with excellent bibliography and references in mindfulness research: http://www.mindfulexperience.org/ publishes the Mindfulness Research Monthly and the Mindfulness Awareness Research Center (MARC), UCLA Semel Institute, University of California http://marc.ucla.edu/ (click on resources)
Mindfulness is may serve as a diagnostic tool and mental training – here are few exercise to try

1. Knowing when slow down: High stress - unexpected complications - team conflicts?

Try to STEP back for a moment

**Purpose:** A One Minute Mindful Pause to Reset One’s Focus and Priorities

Stop what you’re doing for a moment.
Take a few breaths, bringing your awareness to each inhalation and exhalation.
Expand your awareness to you whole body, expand your awareness to the situation at hand
Priorities - what is the next right action in accord with your training and values and Proceed - with steady full breath

2. Mindfulness Diagnostics: Body scan using 8 breaths

No matter how busy your life is, no matter where you are, you can find a few moments do to do this 10 breath mindful check in and relaxation exercise. It is particularly helpful for those who get really focused on the work at hand and stand or sit for prolonged periods.

Begin with the intention to put aside all your preoccupations for the next 1-2 minutes as you take 10 8 steady full breaths.

- 1st exhale: be aware of and relax your face, forehead, eyes, scalp and jaw.
- 2nd exhale: be aware of and relax your neck, shoulders, and arms.
- 3rd exhale: be aware of and relax your entire back.
- 4th exhale: be aware of and relax your chest and belly, keep your belly soft.
- 5th exhale: be aware of and relax your lower extremities (thighs, legs and feet.)
- 6th exhale: shift your awareness to your whole body get a sense of your entire body.
- 7th breath: be aware of and bring a sense of relaxation to on your body globally.
- 8th breath: continuing to bring a sense of relaxation to your body as a whole.
- 9th and 10th breaths: As you end this brief mindful check in / check up consider a slight smile at thought of giving yourself a moment of self care and understanding
A Few of the Mindfulness Skills You May Practice in Everyday Life

- Pausing to notice your breath
- Noticing the feel of an instrument in your hands
- Noticing your patient’s eyes- the expression on their face
- Taking noticing of your own thought, sensation or emotions during the day
- Being curious about a your own thoughts and opinions without automatically buying into them as true or a fact
- Eating intentionally - noticing the colour, flavours, temperature of the food
- Taking a mindful breath before logging on – using a computer
- Taking a mindful breath before checking your pager...blackberry ...iPhone for messages
- Staying in the moment in an everyday life activity (sipping tea, washing your hands, walking)
- Offering self understanding or compassion to yourself when you fell you have missed the mark (striving for excellence without harsh self criticism)

Sources include: Insight Mediation Centre and MARC, UCLA,(websites listed below)

For additional information, you may contact:

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Suggested Resources for Mindfulness Meditation

Listed here are a few of the many and growing number of excellent resources.

Introduction to Mindfulness Meditation Resources – Audio CDs and MP3 downloads

Jon Kabat-Zinn Mindfulness For Beginners Audio CD may be ordered through most booksellers or go to [http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/](http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/) and consider Series 2 which introduces a range of mindfulness meditation practices

Introductory online course and audio downloads at The Insight Meditation Center (IMC) [http://www.audiodharma.org/onlinecourses.html](http://www.audiodharma.org/onlinecourses.html) [http://www.audiodharma.org/talks-intromed.html](http://www.audiodharma.org/talks-intromed.html)

Short introductory mindfulness meditations in a mp3 format. Access and download the audio files through University of California Los Angeles, Mindfulness Awareness Research Center [http://marc.ucla.edu/](http://marc.ucla.edu/) (click on mindful meditation)


A few notable mindfulness teachers with audio and book resources:

Jack Kornfield [http://www.jackkornfield.org](http://www.jackkornfield.org)

Pema Chodron [http://pemachodron.org](http://pemachodron.org)

Sharon Salzberg [http://www.sharonsalzberg.com](http://www.sharonsalzberg.com)

Books on Mindfulness Meditation

Martina Bachelor (2001) Meditation for Life


Bhante H. Gunaratana Mindfulness In Plain English. Available for purchase and full text available online: [http://www.budsas.org/ebud/mfneng/mind0.htm](http://www.budsas.org/ebud/mfneng/mind0.htm)


Mindfulness Meditation Readings for Health Professionals:


Dan Siegel, M.D. (2007) *The Mindful Brain*


Websites

Center for Mindfulness in Medicine at UMASS Boston - Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). Site includes links to MBSR program across North America and internationally.  
http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/home/

Mindfulness Awareness Research Center  
http://marc.ucla.edu/ (online classes occasionally)

The Insight Meditation Center (IMC) Online courses  
http://www.audiodharma.org/onlinecourses.html

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) is designed to help people who suffer repeated bouts of depression and chronic unhappiness.

A website on mindfulness, Buddhism and addictions with talks that can be downloaded:  
http://www.kevingriffin.net

Mindfulness Meditation Training Resources for Therapists

Centre for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society, University of Massachusetts’s Medical School, Worcester, MA 01655 http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/

Insight Meditation Society, 1230 Pleasant Street, Barre, MA 01005 www.dharma.org

Spirit Rock, P.O. Box 909, Woodacre, CA 9473 www.spiritrock.org

True North Insight Meditation www.truenorthinsight.org/ (A Canadian organization)