MINDFULNESS

Main Points:

- Regular mindfulness practice of 10-15 minutes/day can improve sleep and overall wellbeing
- Start with 2-5 min of mindfulness while conducting a daily activity, then work up to longer periods of time.
  - Recommended to start practicing mindfulness while performing daily activities such as washing dishes, eating, or walking. Aim to do one of these activities mindfully each day.

What is Mindfulness?

- “Mindfulness is an intentional act of present moment awareness without judgement or attachment to outcomes” (Kabat-Zinn, 1990)
  - **Intentional**: making an active and conscious effort to be mindful
  - **Awareness of the Present Moment**: focusing on “the now”
    - gently bringing attention back to “the now” if mind drifts
  - **Without Judgement**: awareness without a preference for a certain outcome;
    - there is no “perfect” way to be mindful (Garner & Tatta, 2022)
    - avoid frustration when mind wanders or when practicing mindfulness is challenging
    - be gentle and kind with self as practice mindfulness
    - approach mindfulness with curiosity (example “Isn’t it interesting that my mind tends to wander to

How to Start Mindfulness Practice:

- Recommend start mindfulness practice at “manageable amount” for client; often 2-5 min, 2-3x/day for many people, then work up to longer.
- Recommend start with mindful activity while performing any daily task like washing dishes, eating, walking to give some structure
  - systematically focus on each of the 5 senses while performing the task

**Examples of Mindful Activities**

**TOUCH:** Notice the temperature of the water. Notice the smoothness of the dish in your hand. Notice the softness of the sponge. Notice how your body feels. Perhaps your feet or back are tired from standing.

**HEAR:** Notice the sound of the running water, the sound the water/dishes make, and you take them in and out of the water, the clanging of dishes, the bubbles softly popping.

**SMELL:** What do you smell? Perhaps notice the lingering smell of the meal you finished or the candle burning.

**SEE:** Look at the food and notice its color, texture, and shininess.

**TASTE:** What flavors and tastes are you experiencing? Does your food taste sweet or salty?

**SMELL:** What do you smell? Can you distinguish the different scents? Allow the aromas to fill your body and focus your brain onto what is in front of you. When smelling, do any specific memories come up? Allow the thoughts to flood in, and then gently come back to the present.
Common Challenges with Mindfulness

- May seem like too big of a task to take on: start by being mindful during daily tasks
- Our thoughts can be influenced by our emotions and biases; meaning, they may not be accurate representations of reality.
  - Remember that “thoughts are not facts” and “I am not my thoughts.”
- Practicing non-judgement to thoughts can be challenging; be kind to and curious about the wandering mind
- Thoughts and emotions fluctuate.
  - Next moment may be different; learn to accept your thoughts as they come & go in waves
- The goal is NOT to control thoughts

Benefits of Mindfulness

- **Implements Sleep**
  - Mindfulness-awareness practices can improve sleep quality and daytime impairment among older adults with sleep disturbances (Black et al. 2015)
  - Those receiving a mindfulness-based therapy for insomnia (MBTI) had significantly greater reductions in the amount of time awake during the night compared to the self-monitoring group (Ong, 2017)
  - Mindfulness training combined with sleep hygiene guidelines is effective in optimizing sleep benefits and in the treatment of insomnia (Araujo et al., 2017)
- **Improves Wellbeing**
  - Improves quality of life (Garner & Tatta, 2022)
  - Develops a greater capacity to cope with adverse events (Harvard Health, 2022)
  - Improves ability to form deeper, meaningful connections with others (Harvard Health, 2022)
- **Improves Physical Health**
  - Relieves stress (Harvard Health, 2022)
  - Lower blood pressure (Harvard Health, 2022) (NIH, 2021)
  - Reduce chronic pain (Harvard Health, 2022) (NIH, 2021)
  - Improve immune system response (Smith et al., 2017)
- **Improves Mental Health**
  - Can be an important aspect in the treatment of depression, substance abuse, eating disorders, couples’ conflicts, anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorders, PTSD, and other mental health conditions. (Harvard Health, 2022) (NIH, 2021)
  - Improves symptoms of burnout & compassion fatigue (Garner & Tatta, 2022)
  - May decrease cognitive decline from aging or Alzheimer’s Disease (Smith et al., 2017)

**TIP: Create an “Anchor Point”**

An anchor point is something that the individual can return to when they notice their mind starting to wander. This can be as simple as taking a deep breath or noticing a color around them. This helps them to stay in the present moment.
Possible Mechanisms How Mindfulness Can Enhance Sleep

- Improves insomnia symptoms as well as pre-sleep arousal, sleep effort, and dysfunctional beliefs about sleep (Garner & Tatta, 2022).
- “Mindfulness training can shift the autonomic nervous system toward homeostasis, which is how coping and resilience buffer the effects of stress-related disease” (Garner & Tatta, 2022).
- Relieves symptoms in those with anxiety through reduced rumination and diminished emotional reactivity, which together may facilitate sleep (Davis & Hayes, 2012; Rusch et al., 2019).
- “Mindfulness meditation has been shown to decrease ruminative thoughts, diminish emotional reactivity, and promote impartial reappraisal of salient experiences, which together may facilitate sleep” (Rusch et al., 2019).

Dosage

- “The effects of mindfulness meditation tend to be dose-related — the more you do, the more effect it usually has” (Harvard Health, 2022).
  - Start with 2-5 min of mindfulness while conducting a daily activity, then work up to longer periods of time.
  - The key to unlocking the benefits of mindfulness is consistency in practice. (DHS, 2021)
  - Mindfulness practice is repeated in a dose-response relationship such that the more frequently it is practiced, the more one learns to be mindful.
- “Significant improvements in quality of life have been found in 13 minutes of daily meditation over 8 weeks.” (Garner & Tatta, 2022)

Video Resources

- 3-Minute Body Scan to Cultivate Mindfulness
- 10-Minute Guided Mindfulness Meditation with Jon Kabat-Zinn

Additional Resources:

National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health

- Summarizes 8 key things that science says about meditation and mindfulness for health
- “Mindfulness meditation practices may reduce insomnia and improve sleep quality. Their effects are comparable to those of cognitive behavioral therapy or exercise.”

Sleep Health Foundation

- 2-page handout that defines the “9 Principles of Mindfulness” & how they are related to sleep – beginner’s mind, non-striving, letting go, non-judging, acceptance, trust, patience, gratitude, & generosity.
References


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