

MINDFULNESS-BASED PRACTICES

by Mary French, RN, MSW, LCSW-C

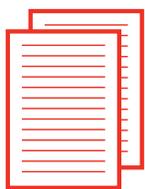
Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is based on ancient Buddhist practices of Vipassana (“Insight”) Meditation and was first introduced into mainstream hospital-based programs in the late 1970s by Jon Kabat-Zinn, author of *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*. Consistently, studies have shown a dramatic reduction in pain for many who have completed eight-week programs at the Center for Mindfulness at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. Since the 1970s, MBSR has flourished and is now being taught in many major medical institutions as part of the mind-body movement in Integrative Medicine.

Mindfulness practice helps with a broad range of medical and psychological issues such as anxiety, stress, pain, and chronic illness. It facilitates deep states of relaxation in which one is able to pay attention to distracting thoughts, sensation, and discomfort, while at the same time learning to work with, rather than ignore, information from the body and mind. The benefits of these techniques include an increased sense of balance and an enhanced capacity to handle life’s challenges with greater clarity and wisdom.

There are many lessons to be learned from the practice of mindfulness, which is achieved by maintaining moment-by-moment, nonjudgmental awareness through a variety of meditative practices. By increasing awareness of the present moment, we increase our ability to:

- See pain closely and clearly.
- Change our relationship and response to pain.
- Realize that we are not our pain and that, at times, we perceive our pain through inaccurate predictions of doom and fear, which contribute greatly to our level of distress.
- Bring a curiosity and interest to what we are experiencing and develop a greater awareness of what our bodies are telling us, strengthening our natural feedback mechanisms to promote regulation and balance of the body and mind.
- Realize we can influence pain levels.
- Learn to use breath to penetrate and soften pain.
- Begin to see that pain, along with everything in life, is constantly changing and we can learn to ride the “waves” of pain knowing it will not always stay at intense levels.
- Decrease negative attentional bias – see more of the positive in our experiences.
- Develop compassionate attitudes toward the self and others.

For more information or to find a program/practitioner near you, visit the University of Massachusetts Center for Mindfulness website, www.umassmed.edu/cfm/mbsr/.



STRATEGIES FOR CHANGING YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON PAIN WITH MINDFULNESS

HANDOUT INSTRUCTIONS

by Mary French, RN, MSW, LCSW-C

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction was first introduced into western traditional medicine by Jon Kabat-Zinn in the late 1970s. When introducing clients to mindfulness – maintaining moment-by-moment nonjudgmental awareness – the following handout can be provided to highlight how it might help work with pain.

Remember that the “power is in the practice,” and clients will need to practice mindfulness to increase awareness and to see some of the benefits. Mindfulness is also an excellent practice for the clinician because it can increase your ability to remain present for your clients and stay centered during difficult times. Think about recording a meditation in your own voice, so that clients may practice at home.

Initially, it can be helpful to use breath as an anchor. Have clients shift awareness to their breath and focus on the physical sensations of breathing. When the mind is pulled away from the breath into thoughts of the past or future, gently notice without judgment and return to the sensations of breathing – over and over. This develops stability of the mind and increased awareness.

Notes:

STRATEGIES FOR CHANGING YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON PAIN WITH MINDFULNESS

- Remember that although pain may not be, suffering is optional.
- Surrendering to the fact that the situation is as it is, whether you like it or not: this is not the same as resignation or giving up.
- Instead of exhausting yourself with distraction, try exploring the pain with interest and curiosity.
- Increase your awareness of the qualities of your pain, e.g., “sharp, stabbing, burning, pulling” and try not to use loaded descriptors such as “awful, horrible.”
- Begin to notice that pain levels are always changing.
- Trust that, since other people have made it through this, you can too.
- Remember that you are not your pain.
- There is more right with you than wrong with you.
- You may discover spaces between the pain sensations where you may rest.
- Explore your greatest fears and practice acceptance and letting go.
- Accept setbacks and go on.
- Use healing imagery such as imagining yourself grounded like a mountain that stays rooted to the earth regardless of the weather around it.
- Expand your compassion for all people, including yourself.
- Trust that you will be able to handle whatever happens.
- Notice that, if you’re doing your best, that’s the best you can do anyway.
- Realize that it’s very likely not as bad as your worst thoughts about it.
- Ask yourself if you are truly taking care of yourself – be open to new ways of self-care.
- Be open to the problem/pain as a great teacher and making a contribution to you or others in some way.