

MINDFULNESS-BASED PRACTICES

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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/.