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Accredited Counsellors, Coaches,
Psychotherapists and Hypnotherapists

ACCPH

Mindfulness

Therapy

Mindfulness

Mindfulness originated from Buddhist meditation that helps people focus on the present to gain greater awareness of their emotions and improve general well-being.

"Mindfulness is the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment. By cultivating mindful awareness, we discover how to live in the present moment rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about tomorrow".

Mindfulness is an integrative, mind-body based technique that enables people to change the way they think and feel about their stressful experiences.

The practice of mindfulness involves being aware moment-to-moment, of one's subjective conscious experience from a first-person perspective. When practising mindfulness, one becomes aware of one's "stream of consciousness". The skill of mindfulness can be gradually developed using meditational practices that are described in detail in the Buddhist tradition. The Five-Aggregate Model, an ancient model of the mind and body, is a helpful theoretical resource that could guide mindfulness interventions. The term "mindfulness" is derived from the Pali-term 'sati' which is an essential element of Buddhist practice.

It has been popularised in the West by Jon Kabat-Zinn with his Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction programme (MBSR).

Mindfulness is also an attribute of consciousness long believed to promote well-being. Large population-based research studies have indicated that the construct of mindfulness is strongly correlated with well-being and perceived health. Studies have also shown that rumination and worry contribute to mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety, and that mindfulness-based interventions are effective in the reduction of both rumination and worry.

Since the 1970s a number of therapeutic applications based on mindfulness for helping people who are experiencing a variety of psychological conditions have been developed. Mindfulness practice is being employed in psychotherapy to alleviate a variety of mental and physical conditions, such as bringing about reductions in depression symptoms, reducing stress, anxiety, and in the treatment of drug addiction. It has gained worldwide popularity as a distinctive method to handle emotions.

Clinical studies have documented the physical and mental health benefits of mindfulness in general, and MBSR in particular. Programmes based on MBSR and similar models have been widely adapted in schools, prisons, hospitals, and other environments.

People have a tendency to work on 'autopilot' much of the time, doing things without really giving them any thought. Consider your drive to work in the morning - are you

thinking about changing gears and steering, or are you mentally planning the day ahead? Have you ever eaten a snack while working/watching TV only to later find yourself with an empty packet and no memory of having eaten anything? These are both perfect examples of **mindlessness** - something many of us can relate to.

Mindfulness aims to reconnect us with ourselves to alleviate stress. It also helps us to feel more attuned with our emotions and generally more aware of ourselves both mentally and physically. Mindfulness is a specific way of paying attention to what is happening in our lives in the present moment, as it truly is. Of course it won't eliminate life's pressures - but with practice it can help us take notice of (and hopefully stop) negative, habitual reactions to everyday stress. Mindfulness helps us to react differently to those stresses.

It has deep roots in ancient Buddhist meditation practices but also draws on recent psychological and scientific advances. It can be of significant value for many people to help find peace in a frenetic world. The most common way this technique is practiced is through mindfulness meditation. This usually involves practitioners focusing on sights, sounds and physical sensations while trying to reduce 'brain chatter'.

Some people struggle with mindfulness meditation at first, finding it hard to focus their attention, but this is to be expected and may require practice. Practicing the technique regularly can help people take a step back, acknowledge their 'brain chatter' and view it accurately and without judgement.

Neuroscience studies have found significant changes in those areas of the brain associated with decision-making, attention and empathy in people using Mindfulness meditation.

These studies have also shown that Mindfulness increases the size of the brain where regulating emotion occurs. It also improves people's attention span so can help with performance, productivity and satisfaction in whatever is being undertaken.

It is already known that meditation increases blood flow to the brain, reduces blood pressure in the whole body and in doing reduces the risk of developing hypertension and cardiovascular disease.

People who have learned mindfulness tend to experience long-lasting physical and psychological stress reduction and develop positive changes in well-being. They are less likely to be depressed or get mental exhaustion.

Many become able to control any addictive behaviours they had previously.

It sounds quite simple but for many people it is incredibly hard to learn. There are many ways to learn mindfulness but going to a good school is important. There are

many therapist who have attended a 1 or 2 day workshop teach this to clients. ACCPH does not believe that is enough training and a client should look for someone with more in depth training and can actually do it them self; not just tell people what to do.

Mindfulness Meditation

Mindfulness meditation is practiced sitting with eyes closed, cross-legged on a cushion, or on a chair, with the back straight. Attention is put on the movement of the abdomen when breathing in and out, or on the awareness of the breath as it goes in and out the nostrils. If one becomes distracted from the breath, one passively notices one's mind has wandered, but in an accepting, non-judgmental way and one returns to focusing on breathing. A famous exercise, introduced by Kabat-Zinn in his MBSR-program, is the mindful tasting of a raisin, in which a raisin is being tasted and eaten mindfully.

Meditators start with short periods of 10 minutes or so of meditation practice per day. As one practices regularly, it becomes easier to keep the attention focused on breathing. Eventually awareness of the breath can be extended into awareness of thoughts, feelings and actions.

There are many different ways to complete mindfulness meditations. Some may involve movement - using Tai Chi exercises.

The first step you should take is to simply take notice of your thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and the world around you. While it may not sound like much, taking 10 minutes a day to notice these kinds of things are great for getting you out of the auto-pilot mode many of us fall into. It is useful to have a 'set' time in the day to do this: your journey to work, after lunch/dinner or before you go to bed

Try looking at things from a different perspective by trying new things.

Scientific research on Mindfulness

Research on the neural perspective of how mindfulness meditation works suggests that it exerts its effects in components of attention regulation, body awareness and emotional regulation. When considering aspects such as sense of responsibility, authenticity, compassion, self-acceptance and character, studies have shown that mindfulness meditation contributes to a more coherent and healthy sense of self and identity.

Neuroimaging techniques suggest that mindfulness practices such as mindfulness meditation are associated with "changes in the anterior cingulate cortex, insula,

temporo-parietal junction, fronto-limbic network and default mode network structures." It has been suggested that the default mode network of the brain can be used as a potential biomarker for monitoring the therapeutic benefits of meditation.

Benefits of Mindfulness

In recent years mindfulness techniques have gained steam in the counselling world after a string of clinical studies supported its effectiveness. GPs and counsellors are learning more about mindfulness and in many situations it is not only recommended, but also prescribed to those who could benefit. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has also clinically approved MBCT as a 'treatment of choice' for those with recurrent depression.

Since the concept of mindfulness arrived in the west in the 1970s the claimed benefits have been substantiated by several clinical studies. The aim of mindfulness is to help individuals do the following:

- recognise, slow down or even stop negative, habitual reactions
- see situations with more clarity
- respond more effectively to situations
- enhance creativity
- feel more balanced at work and at home.
- 70% reduction in anxiety
- ongoing reduction in anxiety after taking MBSR course
- fewer visits to the doctors
- increase in disease-fighting antibodies
- better quality of sleep
- fewer negative feelings, including tension, anger and depression
- improvements in physical conditions such as chronic fatigue syndrome and psoriasis.
- Insomnia
- Chronic pain
- Addictive behaviour
- Eating disorders

Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) is a mindfulness-based cognitive therapy programme developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts

Medical Center, which uses a combination of mindfulness meditation, body awareness, and yoga to help people become more mindful. In recent years, meditation has been the subject of controlled clinical research.

This suggests it may have beneficial effects, including stress reduction, relaxation, and improvements to quality of life, but that it does not help prevent or cure disease. While MBSR has its roots in spiritual teachings, the program itself is secular.

MBSR looks to help people cope with stress using mindfulness techniques such as gentle stretching, mindfulness meditation and other mind-body exercises. The aim is to offer a greater clarity on what is happening, to help people recognise stress triggers and deal with them in a productive manner. According to the Mental Health Foundation, the majority of those who take part in MBSR courses are reported to feel more engaged in work, less anxious and have fewer physical symptoms of stress.

Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)

Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) is a psychological therapy designed to aid in preventing the relapse of depression, specifically in individuals with Major depressive disorder (MDD). It uses traditional cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) methods and adds in newer psychological strategies such as mindfulness and mindfulness meditation. Cognitive methods can include educating the participant about depression. Mindfulness and mindfulness meditation, focus on becoming aware of all incoming thoughts and feelings and accepting them, but not attaching or reacting to them.

Like CBT, MBCT functions on the theory that when individuals who have historically had depression become distressed, they return to automatic cognitive processes that can trigger a depressive episode. The goal of MBCT is to interrupt these automatic processes and teach the participants to focus less on reacting to incoming stimuli, and instead accepting and observing them without judgment. This mindfulness practice allows the participant to notice when automatic processes are occurring and to alter their reaction to be more of a reflection. Research supports the effects of MBCT in people who have been depressed three or more times and demonstrates reduced relapse rates by 50%.

As well as helping those with recurrent depression, this therapy has been proven to help with a variety of mental health issues, including:

- addiction
- anxiety disorders
- bipolar disorders

- chronic fatigue syndrome
- insomnia
- obsessive compulsive disorder.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

Acceptance and commitment therapy or (ACT) (typically pronounced as the word "act") is a form of clinical behaviour analysis (CBA) used in psychotherapy. It is an empirically-based psychological intervention that uses acceptance and mindfulness strategies mixed in different ways] with commitment and behaviour-change strategies, to increase psychological flexibility. The approach was originally called comprehensive distancing.

Dialectical Behaviour Therapy

Mindfulness is a "core" exercise used in dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT), a psychosocial treatment Marsha M. Linehan developed for treating people with borderline personality disorder. DBT is dialectic, explains Linehan, in the sense of "the reconciliation of opposites in a continual process of synthesis." As a practitioner of Buddhist meditation techniques, Linehan says:

This emphasis in DBT on a balance of acceptance and change owes much to my experiences in studying meditation and Eastern spirituality. The DBT tenets of observing, mindfulness, and avoidance of judgment are all derived from the study and practice of Zen meditations.

Mode Deactivation Therapy

Mode deactivation therapy (MDT) is a treatment methodology that is derived from the principles of cognitive behavioural therapy and incorporates elements of Acceptance and commitment therapy, Dialectical behaviour therapy, and mindfulness techniques. Mindfulness techniques such as simple breathing exercises are applied to assist the client in awareness and non-judgmental acceptance of unpleasant and distressing thoughts and feelings as they occur in the present moment. Mode Deactivation Therapy was developed and is established as an effective treatment for adolescents with problem behaviours and complex trauma-related psychological problems.