

## **BEING MINDFUL**

Most of us move through our lives unconsciously—racing and tearing through our moments, often without conscious awareness of our surroundings or experiences. We spend much of our lives absorbed in our thoughts and visions of a past that is long gone, or a future that has yet to come. In the process, we spend much of our day out of touch with the present moment.

Being mindful means being aware of the present moment; consciously noticing, listening to, smelling, touching and tasting the experiences that we are having in the here and now. It is the practice of paying attention with an open and non-judging attitude to our thoughts and feelings as they come and go, and to the things that happen about and around us in the present moment—moment by moment.

## **BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS**

- ❖ Increased awareness of and focus on the present moment; decreased rumination about past events and future worries or concerns; increased physical and psychological energy; improved physical and psychological health and sense of well-being.
- ❖ Improved sense of seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, tasting and being.
- ❖ Increased awareness of our internal state (thoughts and feelings, mood, physical sensations); increased insight into ourselves and our relationship with others and the world in which we live; increased sense of self-control, and decreased need to control others or the natural course of life.
- ❖ Increased awareness and appreciation of our external surroundings; increased attention to the details of our lives and living; improved quality of life.
- ❖ Increased awareness of and appreciation for the people that we interact with on a moment-by-moment basis; improved communication and relationship with others; increased patience with, and understanding of others.
- ❖ Improved concentration and ability to focus on one thing or one task at a time; increased efficiency and productivity.
- ❖ Decreased tension; increased ability to effectively manage stressful events and moments as they arise; increased ability to create moments of calm and quiet, even in the midst of crisis and chaos; decreased heart rate, decreased blood pressure, increased lung capacity and improved breathing.
- ❖ Improved mood; increased emotional stability.
- ❖ Increased ability to slow down and rest when rest is needed; improved sleep.

## **BEGINNING**

- ❖ Take a few minutes several times a day to pause and simply observe and notice. Focus and re-focus your attention on the present moment. Observe your surroundings: notice where you are, what you are seeing, what you are hearing and smelling, what you are eating and tasting, whom you are with, and so on. Notice how your thoughts and feelings come and go, without warning, rhyme or reason. Notice how your thoughts and feelings are constantly changing, fleeting.
- ❖ When your attention strays, as it will, consciously bring it back to the present moment. Allow your thoughts and feelings to rise and fall, come and go—without judging or clinging to them, or trying to subdue them.
- ❖ Do one thing at a time, being fully aware of exactly what you are doing from moment to moment. Focus your full attention on whatever action you are taking, whatever task you are doing in the present moment. Notice your body, your thoughts, and your feelings without getting caught up in them, returning your focus over and over again to the present moment, bringing your full attention back to what you are doing.
- ❖ Pay attention to the quality of your experience; the sound, the sight, the taste, the touch. Look for and appreciate at least one thing in every experience that you live. Fully savor those moments that bring beauty, peace, happiness and greater wisdom.
- ❖ Practice patience with your self; do not fight with the thoughts and feelings that arise or try to stop them, allow them to come and go without judgment, returning your focus and attention over and over again to the present moment—the moment at hand.
- ❖ Remind yourself regularly that all we have with any degree of certainty is the present moment.

## **PRACTICE**

The most useful attitudes that you can bring to the following exercises are patience and willingness to practice, practice, practice the art of living in the present moment. Let go of any ideas of where this practice will take you or how it will improve or fix you. Just choose to practice, and to be present—moment-to-moment.

**Breathe Mindfully.** Sit in a quiet place and focus your full attention on your breath. Inhale deeply, filling your lungs completely; exhale completely, allowing your body to relax and release downward with gravity. Be aware of the coolness of the air as it enters your nostrils; notice your abdomen, diaphragm and lungs expand as the air fills them; notice your body melt downward with gravity, slowly releasing tension as the air is slowly released from your body; notice the pause between breaths, and feel your heart beat. When you become aware that your thoughts are wandering, gently return your attention to your breath; focus and re-focus your attention on your breath. Several times each day, stop and take a letting-go breath, sigh completely.

**Walk or Drive Mindfully.** While walking or driving, focus your full attention on your surroundings. Pay attention to the road and your driving; notice the sights, the colors and texture of the world that surrounds you; listen to the sounds, smell the smells, feel the breeze as it touches your skin and the warmth of the sun as it touches your body. When thoughts intrude or feelings arise, as they undoubtedly will, observe them, acknowledge them, release them, and return your attention to your surroundings and the moment at hand. When past events or future worries or concerns arise, observe the thoughts or feelings without judgement or clinging; gently remind yourself that it is the present, and that, for the moment, you are focusing only on the present; over and over again, return your attention to your surroundings.

**Listen Mindfully.** Listen to another person with your full, undivided attention. Be fully present in the moment and interaction. Become aware of your own inner chatter: for example, your thoughts about what you will say in response, or your feelings or judgements about what is being said, or the laundry list of other things that come to mind that you would rather be or should be doing something else, etc. Stop the chatter by saying to yourself “STOP”, and immediately refocus your attention on what the other person is saying. Over and over again, return your full attention to the other person. Listen to their words; be aware of their expressions, body posture, and body language. If you don't understand, ask for clarification until you do understand what they are trying to say. Return your attention over and over again to what is being said and unsaid.

### **Pause Mindfully.**

- ❖ Identify your personal warning signals (i.e. irritability, impatience, decrease frustration tolerance, muscle tension, anger, weariness, etc.) that warn you when you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed, that your life is moving too quickly, that there are too many demands on your person and time, that you are running near empty, or that you are just plain sick and tired. Take or schedule a break from the pace to regroup.
- ❖ Pause for one minute every fifty-nine minutes. For a moment, put the world (people, telephones, computers, etc.) on hold. Close your eyes. Inhale deeply and exhale completely while watching the second hand on a clock or watch. Focus and refocus your attention on your breathing and on the second hand on the clock or watched.
- ❖ When pressured to give an immediate response or decision, or when your anger arises in the course of conversation with another, either excuse yourself for one minute to breathe and collect your thoughts before responding or continuing the conversation, or quietly inhale and exhale while silently counting to ten (10).
- ❖ Ideally, pausing for one (1) minute out of every (60) minutes is the most restful and healing way to practice being mindful.

**Eat Mindfully.** Especially during work, take time away from your desk to eat your lunch. Look at what you are eating, then close your eyes and focus your full attention on the smell of your food. Breathe slowly, and allow yourself to relax between bites. Chew slowly and savor the taste and texture of the food in your mouth. Even though work waits, remind yourself not to get ahead of yourself; remind yourself to enjoy the present moment, the break from the pace and the food that you are eating.