

Mindfulness:

Its Benefits in Meeting the Challenges of Contemporary Living



By
Gina Rubinsky

The pressures of contemporary society and the juggling between our many roles and commitments, coupled by the ongoing barrage of technology we are exposed to, place significant demands upon us, both physically and emotionally. Burnout is becoming increasingly prevalent. Stress levels continue to be on the rise and as a result, our overall sense of well-being is suffering.



Living Arts
Wellness Based Services

Mindfulness Based Stress Management Program

An 8 week group program designed to assist you in cultivating your inner resources to effectively cope with both physical and emotional stress. The program offers instruction in mindfulness based meditation accompanied by an in-depth exploration of how to integrate mindfulness into daily life. All this occurs within a supportive group environment.

Sessions: 2013/2014
Fall 2013: September 25th - November 13th
Winter 2014: January 15th - March 5th
Spring 2014: April 23rd - June 11th
Time: Wednesdays, 6:30 PM - 8:30 PM
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Montreal, Quebec, H4A 1W3

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The prevalent tendency seems to be to define ourselves by that which we accomplish and produce in the external world accompanied by a “forgetting” of who we are and of our intrinsic worth simply as human beings and not only as ‘human doings’. Living our lives on automatic pilot, we may miss out on the preciousness of every moment and the potential to live our lives with greater vitality and personal purpose.

So how can mindfulness support us in facing every day challenges with a sense of presence and centredness? Probably best to first explore what **Mindfulness** actually means. It involves waking up to our life exactly as it is. We bring a non-judgmental attention to our moment to moment experience, aware of what is present in our bodies, our emotions, our thoughts, reactions and interactions with the world around us. This attention is very different from our usual way of paying attention. So much of our thoughts are involved in assessing, comparing, pushing away, clinging to, criticizing and evaluating, stuck in the past or fantasizing about the future. We tend to get lost in the stories and dramas, the trance of the mind, which only serves to distance us from meeting the moment with clarity. Mindfulness invites us to pause, regroup in present time and respond to whatever is arising, whether pleasant or unpleasant, with wisdom and compassion.

Essentially it is not the events, people or occurrences in our lives that are the source of the stress and difficulty we experience, but rather our perception of them. In perceiving an event as harmful, an attack or a threat to survival, we enter fight, flight or freeze mode which is activated by our sympathetic

nervous system. It is this unconscious reactivity that adversely affects the balance of our physical and emotional state if sustained over a long period of time and can result in stress related health conditions. This may initially occur due to an injury, illness or an emotional trauma or due to ongoing daily pressures during which time there has been no respite. To regain our equilibrium and homeostasis in the face of both daily stressors and more acute triggers, our capacity to move out of harmful reactivity and enter conscious response mode is of utmost importance.

Mindfulness Meditation:

Now all of the above, may seem easier said than done. And it is! We all know how trying it can be to interrupt our old conditioned ways of reacting and shift direction. In spite of all of our good intentions, we may find ourselves still reacting in the same learned ways that do not serve us. This is where a formal practice that cultivates the mind's capacity to return to the present moment can be extremely beneficial. Just as we train the body through physical exercise, in our meditation practice we are training the mind to be in the present so that when a difficult situation does arise, we are able to access this state of awareness in order to respond in such a way that is effective and does not result in further wear and tear on our mind or our body.

Research has shown that mindfulness meditation has significant benefits in decreasing our physical and emotional vulnerability to the impact of life stressors. If practiced regularly, mindfulness meditation can strengthen the immune system, balance the endocrine system, and produce a host of other medically valuable physiological changes such as lowered blood pressure, decreased cholesterol levels, decreased pain levels and improved sleep. Meditation also has been shown to develop greater resiliency in coping with stress, pain and illness in addition to fostering an enhanced sense of well-being, inner peace and compassion.

Other research findings regarding the neuroplasticity of the brain have indicated that mindfulness meditation may be associated with areas of the brain, important for sensory processing and emotional regulation, as more developed in comparison to non-

meditators. Meditators have also reported lower stress levels in this comparison.

The Mindfulness Based Stress Management Program (MBSR) offered by Living Arts is based on the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Program designed by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn of the University of Massachusetts Health Care Center, who is the best-selling author of [Full Catastrophe Living](#) and [Wherever You Go, There You Are](#). The program has been featured in the Bill Moyers' PBS documentary *Healing and The Mind*, on NBC *Dateline*, on ABC's *Chronicle* as well as in various national print media.

Participants in the program are instructed in the mindfulness practices of sitting and walking meditation, gentle yoga and the body scan and are provided with guided mindfulness meditation cd's to support them in their home practice. There is also a weekly in depth exploration of how to integrate mindfulness into daily life all of which provides a strong foundation for long term self-care beyond the completion of the program.

This journey is an invitation to nourish and develop your own inner resources that can support and empower you regardless of the challenges that you face now or may face in the future. Every moment is a new beginning, a fresh opportunity to heal, to grow and to realize your potential to fully participate in your life, this very one that awaits you.

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THERE IS ONLY ONE WORLD, THE WORLD
PRESSING AGAINST YOU AT THIS MINUTE.
THERE IS ONLY ONE MINUTE IN WHICH YOU
ARE ALIVE, THIS MINUTE HERE AND NOW.
THE ONLY WAY TO LIVE IS BY ACCEPTING EACH
MINUTE AS AN UNREPEATABLE MIRACLE.
- STORM JAMESON