

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

SUMMARY

Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) is a well-defined and systematic patient-centered educational approach that teaches people how to take better care of themselves and live healthier and more adaptive lives. In addition to reducing day-to-day stress, mindfulness can be beneficial for people experiencing a wide range of physical and psychological illnesses in diverse life situations.

Mindfulness practice means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and without judgment. It is not thought of as a technique, but rather as a way of being that can be practiced both formally and informally on a daily basis, independent of any particular problem state. Regulating one's attention, which is believed to lie at the core of perception, appraisal, and insight, lays the foundation for effective coping and behavioral change by reducing stress reactivity. As we step back and observe the flow of consciousness, mindfulness can short-circuit the fight or flight reaction characteristic of the sympathetic nervous system, allowing individuals to respond to the situation at hand, instead of automatically reacting on the basis of past experiences.

It is impossible to fail at mindfulness if one is willing to bring whatever one is experiencing into the field of awareness. Mindfulness meditation is oriented toward what is right with people and aims to nurture and strengthen our innate human capacities for relaxation, awareness, insight, and behavior change. Each individual is encouraged to explore inner resources for growth, learning, and healing in the context of a holistic, self-regulatory approach to health.

MBSR programs consist of 8 weekly group sessions and an additional all day retreat. Participants learn about the psycho-physiology of stress and how to apply mindfulness skills to specific situations. Daily homework largely involves the practice of formal sitting meditation, body scan, walking meditation, eating meditation, and yoga guided by audio recordings.

Interest in MBSR programs has grown significantly since they were introduced in 1979 at the MBSR clinic of the University of Massachusetts, Worcester. Today at least 537 MBSR programs are located across the United States and around the world.

Adapted by Georgia Tetlow, MD from "Integrating Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction," Kathryn Proulx, RN, MS, CS, Holistic Nursing Practice, 2003 - Volume 17 - Issue 4

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