

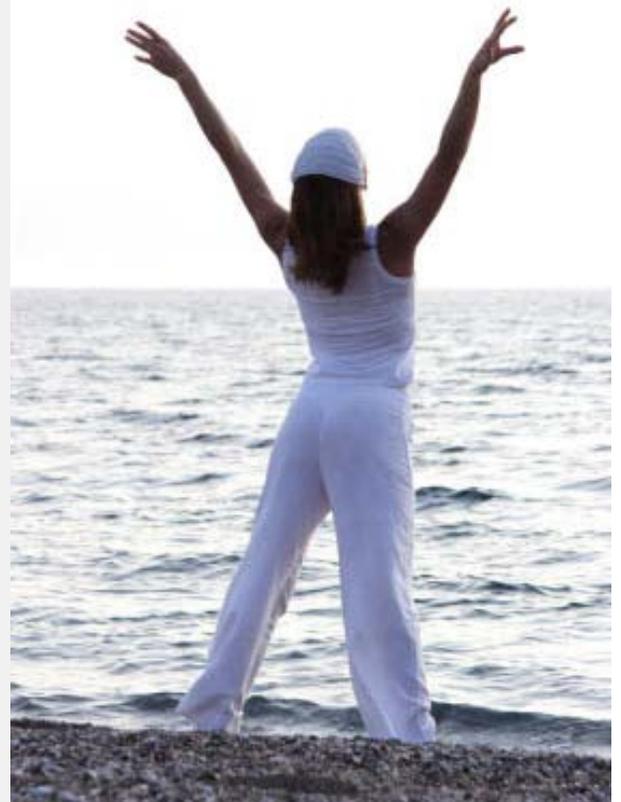


## MIND OVER MATTER: HOW MINDFULNESS CAN IMPROVE YOUR LIFE

The concept of mindfulness was once associated with Buddhism, The Beatles and transcendental meditation. Today, mindfulness is a serious topic of research in the medical community, as a mounting body of evidence demonstrates that it can have a powerful effect on healthy living. This includes physical health as well as mental health. From helping people face the challenges of stress reduction to treating individuals with severe mental health issues, mindfulness is proving to be one of the most adaptive remedies for a range of wellness issues. But what is mindfulness, and how does it work?

### BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS

- **Stress management** - numerous studies point to meditation to reduce anxiety and increase positive affect.
- **Reduced anxiety** – research shows that meditation contributes to faster recovery after a negative provocation.
- **Reduced symptoms of depression** – it has been shown to reduce symptoms and recurrence rates in people suffering from depression.



# HOW MINDFULNESS CAN IMPROVE YOUR LIFE

## WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Essentially, mindfulness involves the self-regulation of attention to bring about a quality of non-elaborative awareness to current experience – an increased recognition of mental events in the present moment. From there, it involves adopting a particular orientation toward one’s experiences in the present moment, an orientation that is characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance. This is often referred to in psychological terms as adopting a de-centred perspective on thoughts and feelings so that they can be experienced subjectively rather than reacted to negatively. The goal is to alter the impact of and response to thoughts, feelings, and sensations.

When one is mindful, the mind responds afresh to the unique pattern of experience in each moment instead of reacting mindlessly to fragments of total experience with old, relatively stereotyped, habitual patterns of mind.

## BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS

The benefits of mindfulness have become increasingly recognized, and meditative practices are now frequently used in hospitals and academic medical centres for outpatients presenting with a range of chronic stress and pain-related disorders and chronic diseases. It is applied under the umbrella of what has come to be called mind/body or integrative medicine. Here are some interesting findings from studying meditation:

- Meditation has been found in numerous studies to reduce anxiety and increase positive effect.
- Recent research indicates that relaxation and stress management procedures increase T-cytotoxic/suppressor (CD3/CD) lymphocytes (which kill cancer cells or virus-infected cells) in HIV-infected men.
- Meditation has been found to show a faster recovery after a negative provocation in individuals with greater left-sided anterior activation.
- It has been shown to reduce symptoms and recurrence rates in people suffering from depression.

An article in the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* by John D. Teasdale, et al, recounts a study on the application of Mindful Based Cognitive Therapy on recurrently depressed patients. The study group consisted of patients currently in remission from recurrent major depression, with the goal of teaching them to become more aware of and to relate differently to their thoughts feelings and bodily sensations. Specifically, it taught them to relate to these feelings and thoughts as passing events in the mind rather than identifying with them or treating them as accurate readouts on reality – “Thoughts are not facts” and “I am not my thoughts.” In so doing, it trained them to disengage from habitual dysfunctional cognitive routines, in particular, depression-related ruminative thought patterns, as a way to reduce future risk of relapse and recurrence of depression. Vulnerability to relapse and recurrence of depression arises from repeated associations between depressed mood and patterns of negative, self-evaluative, hopeless thinking during episodes of major depression. The patients were encouraged to be more aware of negative thoughts and feelings at times of potential relapse/recurrence, and to respond to those thoughts in a de-centered way, thus allowing them to be nipped in the bud at a stage when this

may be much easier than if such warning signs were not noticed or were ignored, as other therapies may prescribe.

The result was that, in participants with three or more previous episodes of depression (who composed 77% of the sample), Mindful Based Cognitive Therapy almost halved relapse/recurrence rates over the follow-up period. The researchers concluded the results were both statistically and clinically significant,

**Meditation and more: In Part Two, we'll provide some tips on how to achieve Mindfulness.**

## REFERENCES

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