

FOREVER ACTIVE

PERSONALIZED FITNESS AND WELLNESS FOR MEN 50+



Mindfulness

Introduction

Our world seems to be full of stress, anxiety, worry. There never seems enough time to do the things we need and/or want to do. We are constantly multitasking and rushing from one task or event to the next and often not enjoying what we are doing when we are doing it. Obesity, diabetes, ulcers, heart disease, cancer and depression are just some of physical and emotional side effects of such a lifestyle. Exercise has been shown to be an effective way of helping to manage and control stress in our lives. Forever Active's April newsletter <http://forever-active.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/15-April-2013-Stress.pdf> dealt with the positive relationship between stress and exercise.

Mindfulness, the act of being conscious of your own thoughts, movements and speech in the present moment without judgement, has been getting a lot of scientific attention in its effectiveness in allowing us to regain control of our hectic lives and the health benefits that result. This newsletter will examine what Mindfulness is, its benefits and how it can be easily and practically practised in our busy daily lives. Mindfulness is a mental skill that requires practice to achieve its full benefits. However, learning to live in the present and focusing on one thing at a time, of becoming conscious of being conscious and cultivating a sense of present time awareness of your thoughts, words and actions can and will bring a sense of peace and control to your life that, for many, has been missing.

Mindfulness In a Nut Shell

Editors Note: Understanding what Mindfulness means is difficult. It is so different from what we do on a daily basis that the concept is hard to understand. Read the definition below a number of times to fully grasp and understand it.

Mindfulness means **being aware**, fully and completely, **from moment to moment**. It means to **live in the moment**, not to judge the moment but to see each moment as a new beginning, a new opportunity to start over, to tune in, and to reconnect. Practicing mindfulness involves stopping all the "doing" in your life and relax into the present without trying to fill it up with anything. **The goal is to purposefully allow your body and mind to come to rest in the moment,** no matter what is "on" your mind or how your body feels. This means allowing yourself to **be in the moment with things exactly as they are, without trying to change anything.**

You need to practise mindfulness in order to reap its benefits. The more systematically and regularly you practice, the more the power of mindfulness will grow and the more its benefits will be experienced.

Did You Know

The Power of the Mind

Just by concentrating your mind on the fitness aspects of the routine physical actions you do daily, you can actually produce beneficial physiological affects.

In 2007, a study by Harvard University researchers demonstrated this.

In this study, two groups of female hotel room attendants were studied. The control group was briefed on the benefits of regular physical activity while the test group was informed that the day-to-day work they performed actually fulfilled the daily requirements for physical activity as per the Surgeon General guidelines.

Body (BMI) and weight measurements were taken for both groups and the results revealed what the mind is truly capable of. The control group showed no body measurement or weight improvements but the test group, now being aware that their daily work-related tasks were contributing to their physical health, dropped an average of two pounds of body weight and showed a consistent reduction in their BMI and blood pressure.

The take away from this study is that exercise is not just a formal aerobic class or muscle resistance workout but is actually part of your daily physical routine. As a result, if you can bring present time awareness to the physical activity you are performing, you can produce positive physiological adaption's and changes in body composition.

The Foundation of Mindfulness Practice

Reference: Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness
By: Jan Kabat-Zin, Ph.D.

The attitude that you bring to the practice of mindfulness will, to a large extent, determine the long-term value of mindfulness. Keeping particular attitudes in mind is actually part of mindfulness training and sets the stage for what is possible by being mindful.

Seven Attitudinal Factors for Mindfulness Practice

There are seven attitudinal factors that make up the pillars of mindfulness practice. Each one relies on and influences the degree to which you are able to cultivate the others.

1. Non-Judging – This means being impartial to your own thoughts and experiences. Almost everything we see and do is categorized by the mind. We judge and react to everything we experience in terms of what we think its value is to us. These judgements often have no objective basis and tend to dominate our thoughts. When practicing mindfulness it is imperative that we be aware of these automatic judgements, prejudices and fears to our thoughts and be impartial to them. To practice effectively, just observe our thoughts but do not judge them or act on them and then revert back to focusing on our breath.

2. Patience - We must accept the fact that sometimes things must unfold in their own way and time. Patience can be a particularly helpful quality to invoke when the mind is agitated.

3. Beginner’s Mind - Too often we let our thinking and our beliefs about what we “know” prevent us from seeing things as they really are. To really appreciate awareness of the present moment we need to be willing to see things as if it was for the first time.

4. Trust - Trusting yourself and your own basic wisdom and goodness is very important in all aspects of mindfulness practice. It is far better to trust in your intuition and your own authority, even if you make some mistakes along the way, than to always look outside of yourself for guidance. Mindfulness emphasizes being your own person, understanding what it means to be yourself, taking responsibility for being yourself and learning to listen and trust yourself.

5. Non-Striving - Meditation is a non-doing, it is simply paying attention to whatever is happening. If you are tense you just pay attention to the tension. If you are criticizing yourself, then observe the activity of the judging mind. Practicing mindfulness simply allows anything and everything that we experience from moment to moment to be here, because it already is.

6. Acceptance - This means seeing and coming to terms with and accepting things as they are in the present. Often we waste a lot of energy denying and resisting what is really fact. We are basically trying to force situations to be the way we would like them to be. The practice of Mindfulness allows us to be open to whatever we are feeling, thinking or seeing and to accept it because it is here right now.

7. Non-Attachment - This attitude of letting go allows us to let things be and accept things as they are. Sometimes we find it difficult to let something go because it has such a strong hold over our minds. In these instances we can direct our attention (mindfulness) to what “holding on” feels like and the consequences it has on our lives. Conversely, when we finally do let go mindfulness allows us to be aware of what it feels like in these moments and what the consequences of that are.

The Practise of Mindfulness

1. Formal Practise: Meditation

Meditation is really about paying attention to the present moment. The challenge is that much of the time our mind is more in the past or the future than it is in the present. Consequently, in any moment we may be only partially aware of what is actually occurring in the present. Our thoughts are so overpowering, particularly in times of crisis or emotional upheaval, that they easily cloud our awareness of the present.

Meditation involves trying to control your focus and the direction of your attention. It is the process of observing the body and mind intentionally, of letting your experiences unfold from moment to moment and accepting them as they are.



How to Practise Meditation

Steps:

1. Close your eyes, sit so your back is straight but not stiff, and become aware of your breathing.
2. Don’t try to control your breathing. Just let it happen and be aware of it, witness it as it flows in and out.
3. Try being with your breath in this way for 3 to 5 minutes.
4. If your mind wanders from your breath note that your mind has done this and then simply let go of whatever your mind is now thinking about bring your attention back to your breathing. Repeat this process each time you find your mind wandering.

2. Informal Practise of Mindfulness

Informal Mindfulness means remembering to be “present” in your waking moments or paying attention from one moment to the next, no matter what you are doing.

Examples:

1. Eating - When you are eating, be aware of what the food looks like, its texture when you are cutting the food, of lifting the food to your mouth and how each bite tastes.
2. Walking or driving - be aware of your surrounding, of people or cars passing by you, the bumps in the road or sidewalk. What is the temperature, is it windy or sunny.

You can practise informal Mindfulness wherever you are. As you practise formal mindfulness meditation you will find yourself practising informal meditation more frequently throughout your waking day and this means you are living in the present and in control of your life more frequently.