

What is this new term Mindfulness?

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Today we hear people talking about being mindful of things, practicing mindfulness and attaining healing through mindfulness. So what is mindfulness, and more to the point, how can it help you and me?

Most definitions describe mindfulness as **paying purposeful attention to the present moment**. It is not just an awareness of what you are doing and thinking but being **completely attentive** to the finer experiential details.

Mindfulness also involves acceptance - meaning that we pay attention to our thoughts and feelings without judging them, without believing, for instance, that there's a "right" or "wrong" way to think or feel in a given moment. When we practice mindfulness, our thoughts tune into what we are sensing in the **present moment** rather than rehashing the past or imagining the future.

Studies have shown that practicing mindfulness, even for just a few weeks, can bring a variety of physical, psychological, and social benefits and studies have found that, after just eight weeks of training, practicing mindfulness meditation boosts our immune system's ability to fight off illness.

The following are just some of the ways mindfulness can help us:

Mindfulness is good for our minds: Several studies have found that mindfulness increases positive emotions while reducing negative emotions and stress. Indeed, at least one study suggests it may be as good as antidepressants in fighting depression and preventing relapse.

Mindfulness is good for our bodies: When we are mindful of our body, we become more attuned to the body's natural processes, and learn how to support them better. But mindfulness in itself has no magical qualities that will allow us to heal sickness or injury beyond what nature itself could do. We're simply increasing our bodies' natural capabilities to heal itself, or perform at our best.

Mindfulness helps us focus: Studies suggest that mindfulness helps us tune out distractions and improves our memory and attention skills. Mindfulness brings us more freedom, so that we're less at the mercy of automatic habits. Mindfulness practiced prior to examinations can enhance memory recall quite effectively. It can also aid significantly in the management of pre-exam nerves.

Mindfulness is good for parents and parents-to-be: Studies suggest it may reduce pregnancy-related anxiety, stress, and depression in expectant parents. Parents who practice mindfulness report being happier with their parenting skills and their relationship with their kids, and their kids were found to have better social skills. Mindfulness is also found to be beneficial when taught to children as young as young pre-schoolers.

Mindfulness helps schools: There's scientific evidence that teaching mindfulness in the classroom reduces behaviour problems and aggression among **students**, and improves their happiness levels and ability to pay attention. **Teachers** trained in mindfulness also show lower blood pressure, less negative emotion and symptoms of depression, and greater compassion and empathy.

Mindfulness helps with PTSD: Studies suggest it can reduce the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the aftermath of trauma.

It is easy to learn and once understood, can be practiced in the privacy of your own home. Some people also enjoy practicing it in groups and enjoy Guided Mindfulness classes. But what seems to be apparent is that whatever way you choose to practice mindfulness the benefits will flow!