



Weekly Tips + Links for Your Health

bcp vpa

THE LEARNING BRAIN

Each week in BCPVPA eNews, we share tips, links and self-assessment tools that will help our members

to better understand the mental health continuum, and to use the resources that are available.

bcpvpa.bc.ca/thelearningbrain



Friday April 3rd, 2020

CALMING A REACTING MIND

JUST BREATHE, JUST BE

How? By focussing on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting your feelings, thoughts and body sensations through a compassionate and non-judging lens.

What is mindfulness?

According to the Mayo Clinic:

Mindfulness is a type of meditation in which you focus on being intensely aware of what you're sensing and feeling in the moment, without interpretation or judgment. Practicing mindfulness involves breathing methods, guided imagery, and other practices to relax the body and mind and help reduce stress.

Why practice mindfulness?

Many of us are weary from information/media overload, overly busy schedules and endless demands which is why it is so important to make space to think, pause and refresh. Practicing mindfulness is a proven way to create measurable changes in the brain regions associated with memory, sense of self, empathy and stress.

The Mayo Clinic further comments: *Spending too much time planning, problem-solving, daydreaming, or thinking negative or random thoughts can be draining. It can also make you more likely to experience stress, anxiety and symptoms of depression. Practicing mindfulness exercises can help you direct your attention away from this kind of thinking and engage with the world around you.*

Xevi Casalona - unsplash.com

For those of you who love science:
[Check out this video](#) on the brain and mindfulness.

Benefits of mindfulness:

- Promotes a calm mind
- Reduce stress
- Improve memory and concentration
- Enhance creativity
- Lessen your emotional reactivity
- Increase empathy
- Improve your mood and resilience

bcfirstrespondersmentalhealth.com



The Basics

Anytime you practice mindfulness, you are focussing on the present moment – most often, concentrating on your breathing. It will be natural for your thoughts to wander. That is ok! This is not about ‘not thinking’.

Mindfulness is about acknowledging thoughts and feelings, without judgement.

Looking at your thoughts from the ‘outside’ looking in and watching them go by as you refocus on your breath. If your mind wanders – no problem. Just notice and bring your attention back to your breath.

[Watch this three minute video](#) to get an overview.
For a deeper understanding, [here is a good read](#).

Guided Meditation

It is very helpful, particularly when you are starting out, to use guided meditation. There are many YouTube guided sessions to try. And there are great apps available, many of which will let you have a free trial. Here are some to check out!

- **Calm** – Many of you have heard of Calm as it used to be available for free for teachers. This is the app that I use, and the ‘lessons’ in the sessions have been life-changing for me, never mind the actual mindfulness practice! There are mindfulness sessions and sleep stories for children as well. Another valuable tool in my household.
- **Headspace** – Another good app that is more “mainstream”
- **Buddhify** – Rates highly amongst users.

[Here is a list](#) of more mindfulness apps
– find one that is right for you.

Get Started!

To get started on your own, here are some great ways to practice mindfulness:

1 Learning to Stay in the Present

A less formal approach to mindfulness can also help you to stay in the present and to fully participate in your life. You can choose any task or moment to practice informal mindfulness, whether you are eating, showering, walking, touching a partner, or playing with a child or grandchild.

Attending to these points will help:

- Start by bringing your attention to the sensations in your body
- Breathe in through your nose, allowing the air downward into your lower belly. Let your abdomen expand fully.
- Now breathe out through your mouth
- Notice the sensations of each inhalation and exhalation
- Proceed with the task at hand slowly and with full deliberation
- Engage your senses fully. Notice each sight, touch, and sound so that you savor every sensation.
- When you notice that your mind has wandered from the task at hand, gently bring your attention back to the sensations of the moment.

Source: <https://www.helpguide.org/harvard/benefits-of-mindfulness.htm>



Nathan Dumlao, Daniel Gaffey - unsplash.com

Next week:
Coping with Anxiety

2 Do a Body Scan

Sit or lie somewhere quiet. Take a few deep breaths. Then slowly focus on different parts of your body simply to experience what you are feeling. No judging or trying to change, just accepting. Relax each body part as you go from head to toe.

I challenge you to find 3 minutes to [try the Body Scan here](#).

3 Take a Mindful Walk

Leave your phone on silent. Focus on each step and how your body feels. Look up and pay attention to your surroundings. Appreciate nature. What do you see? What are the sounds and the scents? A mindful walk can be a solo or group activity.

4 Incorporating mindfulness into your daily routine.

We have lots of opportunities to practice mindfulness as we go about our daily routine, from washing dishes, to exercise, to preparing for bed. Even a couple of minutes here and there are beneficial, and contribute to training your brain to stay in the present. You will also get better and better the more you practice.

[Click here](#) for some wonderful tips on incorporating mindfulness into your daily life.



DO YOU HAVE A FAVOURITE MEDITATION TECHNIQUE?



We'll be posting this question on Twitter and Instagram this week! Follow **@bcpvpa** to read, engage, share and comment!