



**Penn Medicine**  
**Lancaster General Health**

Mind Your Brain

# Prioritizing Mindfulness

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# Have you ever...

- ▶ Sat down with a bag of chips or cookies, started munching, and before you knew it, the whole bag was gone?
- ▶ Pulled out your phone to check your email, only to find yourself scrolling through social media ten minutes later?
- ▶ Listened to someone talk about their success, only to be distracted by thoughts of your own failure?
- ▶ Sat through a long meeting or class, feeling disconnected and thinking how boring it was?

All of these incidents are examples of mindlessness -- of existing and moving through your life without conscious awareness of yourself or of what is going on around you.



# Have you ever...while being mindful

- ▶ Sat down with a bag of chips or cookies, started munching, and before you knew it, the whole bag was gone?

*Sat down to eat without distractions, chewing slowly, enjoying the texture and flavor of the food and how it feels as it travels to your stomach.*

- ▶ Pulled out your phone to check your email, only to find yourself scrolling through social media ten minutes later?

*Notice how your body feels, and what thoughts and emotions arise as you catch yourself scrolling through social media. Take a deep breath and redirect yourself back to the moment, while letting go of any judgements.*

- ▶ Listened to someone talk about their success, only to be distracted by thoughts of your own failure?

*Noticed negative thought patterns as an outside observer and responded with compassion the way you would to a good friend.*

- ▶ Sat through a long meeting or class, feeling disconnected and thinking how boring it was?

*Reconnected with the present by pressing your feet into the ground and your hands into the arm of your chair. Or focusing on 5 things you can see, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and one thing you can taste.*



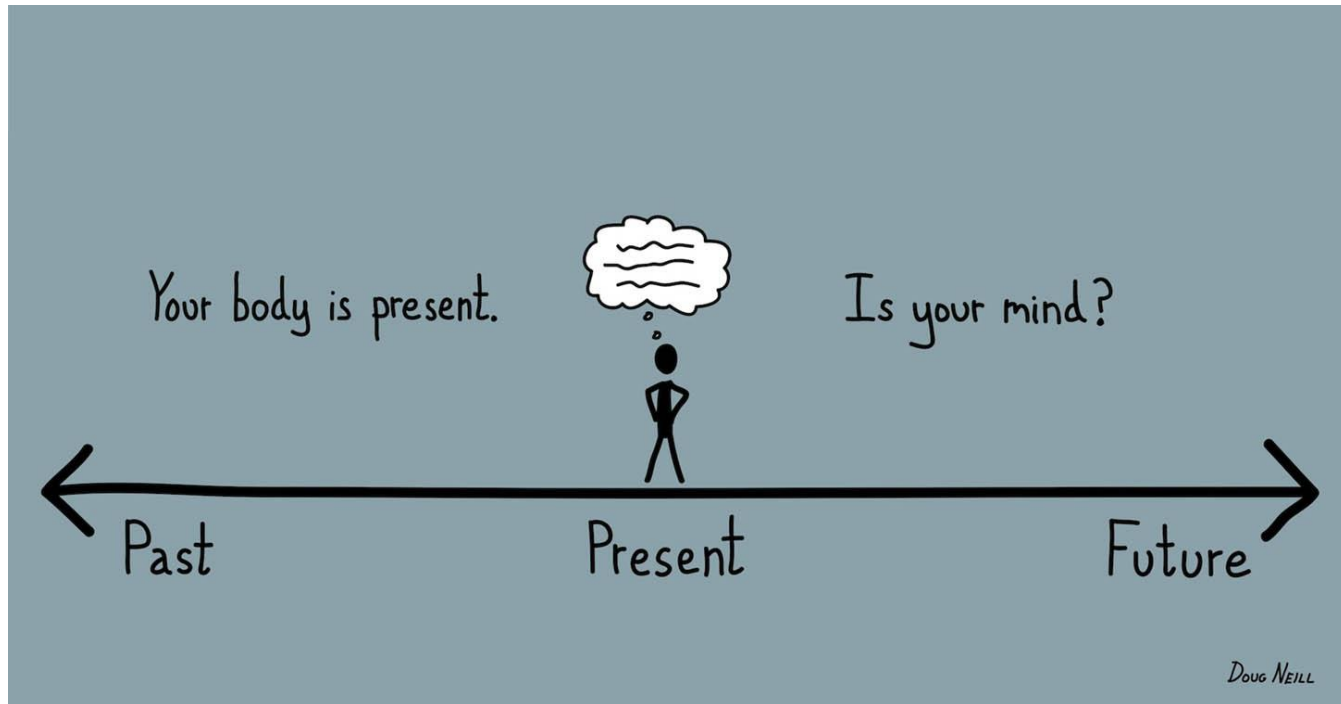
# Objectives

- ▶ **1. Define “mindfulness.”**
- ▶ **2. Identify cognitive and emotional benefits of regular practice.**
- ▶ **3. Explore ways to incorporate mindfulness.**
- ▶ **3. Practice at least one mindfulness technique.**

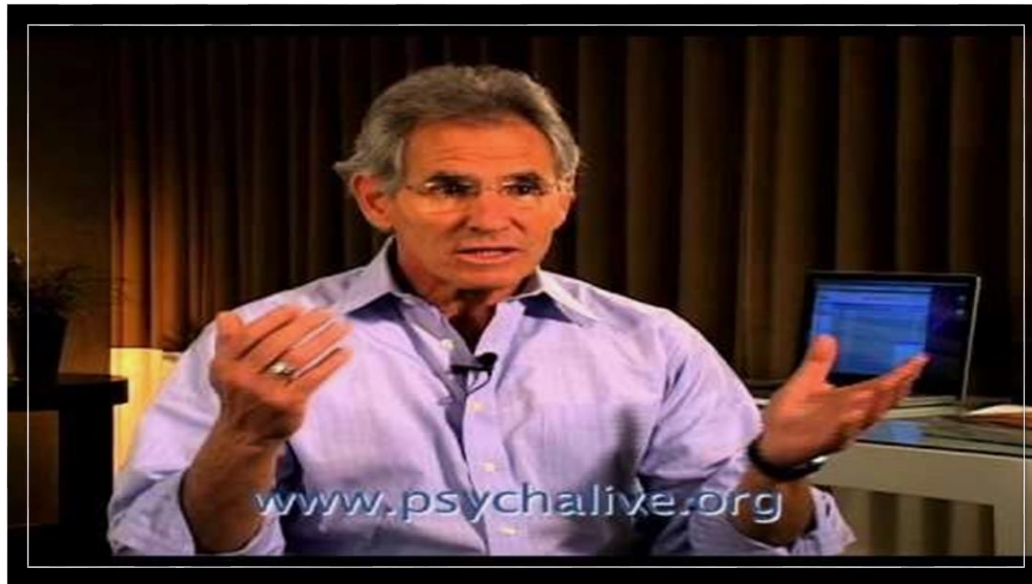


# Mindfulness

“Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally.” – Jon Kabat-Zinn



# Video: “What is Mindfulness?”



# What is mindfulness?

7 components according to Jon-Kabat Zinn:

**Non-judgment:** Be an observer and witness, not an actor.

**Patience:** Grant yourself space, tolerance, and time.

**A beginner's mind:** Think like you are new to something.

**Trust:** Believe in your knowledge and experience.

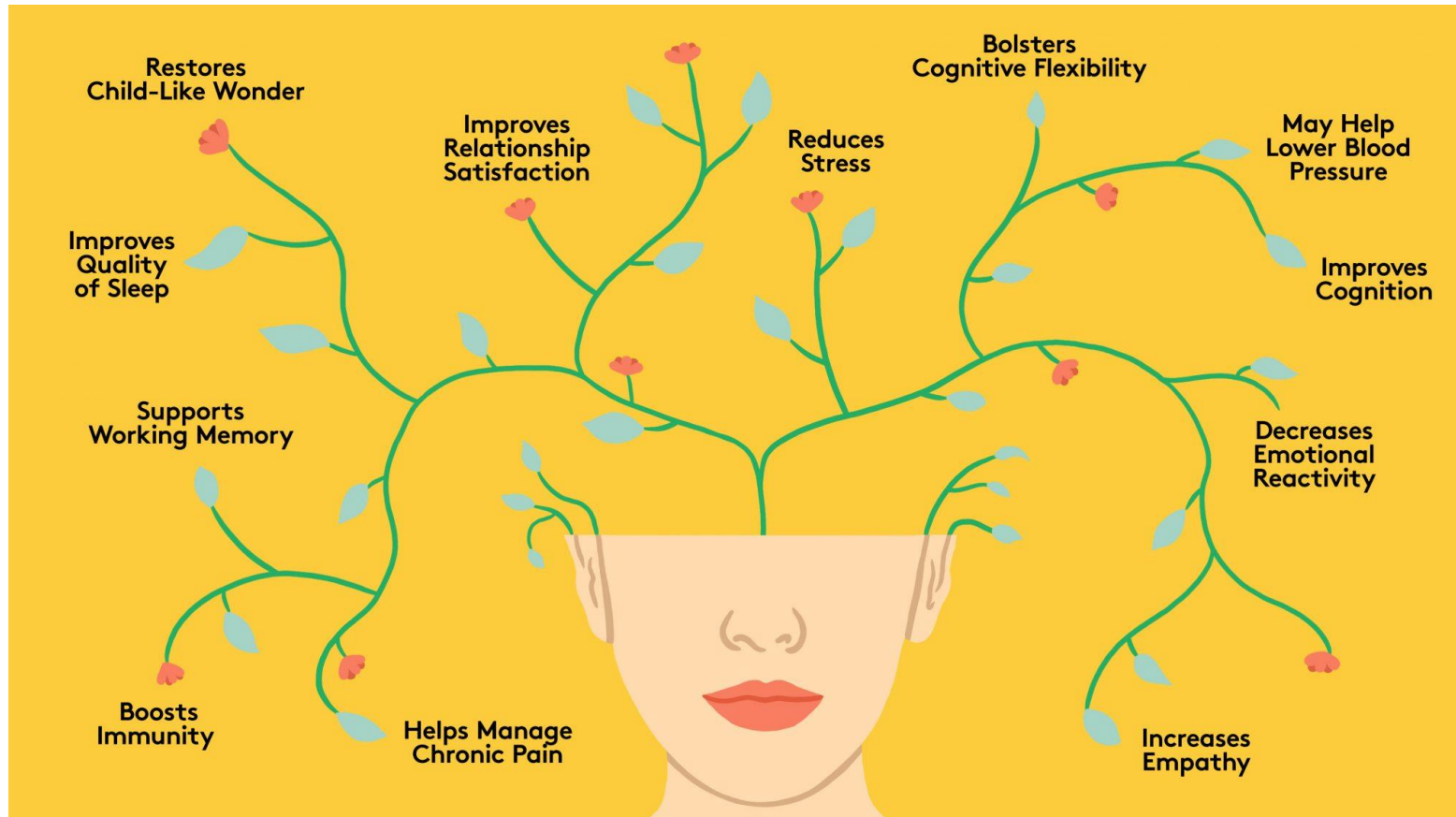
**Non-striving:** Don't try to make anything happen. Just be.

**Acceptance:** Accept your thoughts as they are instead of interpreting your thoughts.

**Letting go:** Be in the moment and let go of things that are not in the moment.



# Why Practice Mindfulness?





# Common Mindfulness Techniques

Formal meditation (see list of resources)

Informal (including “everyday mindfulness”)

Grounding

Relaxation training (deep breathing, passive muscle relaxation, visualization, etc)

Mindful movement (walking, yoga, etc)

Mindful eating



# How can mindfulness improve one's ability to cope with TBI symptoms?

Multiple studies have found that mindfulness can:

- ▶ Improve attention and memory, including decision making, problem solving, and organization.
- ▶ Reduce fatigue.
- ▶ Improve overall mood, including the ability to accept emotional states, awareness in the moment, and the ability to handle negative emotions.
- ▶ Help relieve pain.
- ▶ Improve sleep.
- ▶ Increase hopefulness about the future.
- ▶ More effectively manage and respond to stress.



# MBSR for TBI

**Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction** is an 8-week program created by Jon Kabat-Zinn in 1979, and is now offered in a variety of institutions and online around the world. It incorporates a variety of mindfulness practices such as sitting meditations, mindful yoga, and mindful walking, each emphasizing attitudes of acceptance, patience, and nonjudgmental attention.

Kabat-Zinn's MBSR program was the basis for a pilot study examining its effect on symptoms of chronic mild TBI/postconcussive syndrome. Participants were men and women ages 18 to 62 with mild TBI of at least seven months' duration.

Results showed improvements in memory, attention, and frustration tolerance. While physical symptoms did not improve much, the participants' ability to cope did!



# How Mindfulness Changes the Brain

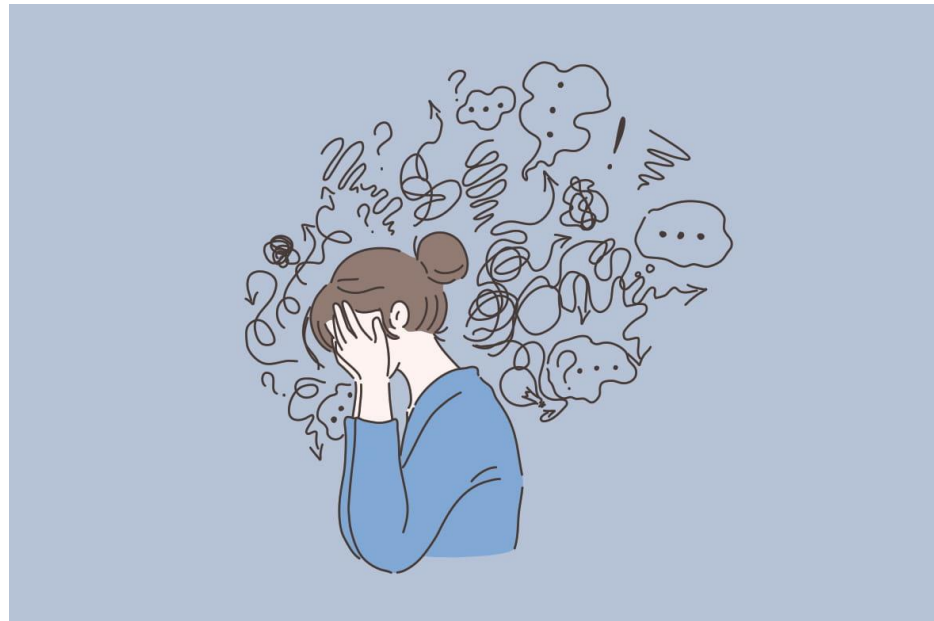
Studies have shown that mindfulness:

- ▶ Increases cortical thickness in the hippocampus, which controls learning and memory, and in certain areas of the brain that are involved in emotion regulation and self-referential processing.
- ▶ Decreases brain cell volume in the amygdala, which is responsible for fear, anxiety, and stress.
- ▶ Increases grey matter volume throughout the brain over long periods of time (in long-term meditators).



# Common Stressors Associated with Brain Injury

- Job loss
- Cognitive and physical barriers
- Family stress
- Loss of independence
- Depression/anxiety
- Existential issues



# How does mindfulness improve our ability to cope with stress?

- Improved awareness of our thoughts.
- Helps you “respond” rather than “react” impulsively to a situation
- Improves awareness of our own needs.
- Reduced conflict with others.
- Reduces activity in the amygdala, which is responsible for detecting stress and releasing stress hormones (adrenaline and cortisol).
- You are better able to focus. So you complete your work more efficiently, you have a greater sense of well-being, and this reduces the stress response.
- You can switch your attitude to stress. Rather than just seeing the negative consequences of feeling stressed, mindfulness offers you the space to think differently about the stress itself. Observing how the increased pressure helps energize you has a positive effect on your body and mind.



# Suffering vs. Mindfulness

When will I be normal again?

I am still the same person.

“I should be able to do this.”

I am doing my best.

A focus on the past or the future.

Accepting the moment as is.

Pushing away negative emotions.

Accepting and allowing oneself to experience negative emotions, including anger, sadness, etc.



# Thought Defusion

According to Russ Harris in ACT Made Simple (2009), cognitive defusion is:

- ▶ Looking at thoughts rather than from thoughts
- ▶ Noticing thoughts rather than becoming caught up in thoughts
- ▶ Letting thoughts come and go rather than holding on to them

## Defusion techniques:

- ▶ **Just Noticing:** Saying to yourself, “I notice I’m having a thought of...”
- ▶ **Mindful Watching:** Looking at your thoughts with curiosity and openness, just noticing how they come and go (flow), without attempting to control or change them (Leaves on a Stream visualization).
- ▶ **Repeating the Thought:** Use a silly voice when repeating the thoughts out loud (e.g., using Bugs Bunny’s voice), sing your thoughts, or repeat the thoughts out loud and over and over until only sound remains.





# Ideas for Informal Mindfulness

- ▶ Mindfulness in your morning routine
- ▶ Mindfulness of domestic chores
- ▶ Mindful Eating



# Resources for Continued Practice

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program (free): <https://palousemindfulness.com/>

## Paid apps:

Headspace

Calm

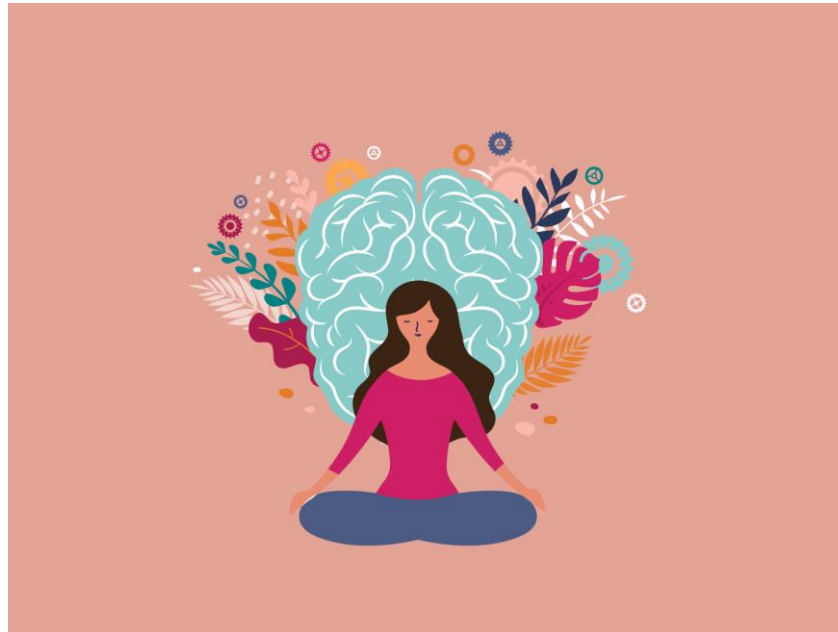
Ten Percent Happier

## Free apps:

Insight Timer

Mindfulness Coach

Smiling Mind





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