



Mindfulness...What's With All The Hype?

Mindfulness is defined as “the practice of maintaining a nonjudgmental state of heightened or complete awareness of one’s thoughts, emotions, or experiences on a moment-to-moment basis”. The practice is very common among Buddhists and has been utilized for centuries to aid in meditation and awareness. It can mean anything from taking a walk and observing your surroundings, to sitting quietly and focusing on

your breathing.

Neuroplasticity is defined as “the change of brain structures as a result of experience”. Regular meditation creates actual changes in brain structure and process, and leads to improved attention, interoception (the sense of the physiological condition of the body), sensory processing, emotional regulation, response control, and increased learning and memory.

One can practice mindfulness when experiencing a distressing emotion. This gives us the opportunity to observe the emotion instead of being swept away by it. Our brain then gets better at doing it on its own. Eventually, distressing emotion does not have to equal depression or despair.

Renz Addiction Counseling Center is incorporating the practice of mindfulness in group and individual counseling to allow clients the opportunity to react differently to various emotions and life situations.

Here are some simple things you can try to start training your brain.

Take a walk. Pay attention to all of your senses-what do you feel, see, and smell? You are setting yourself up for a clearer head and better decision-making.

Get creative. Engaging the creative parts of our brain brings us into the moment.

Breathe. Whether you are counting your breaths while sitting at work, or practicing some deeper breathing, our breath is rhythmic and with us at all times. It is a wonderful way to stay connected to ourselves and be in the moment. 4-4-8 breathing is an effective relaxation technique: breathe in for 4 second, hold it for 4 second, and breathe out for 8 seconds. The extended exhale forces deeper breaths and calms the central nervous system.

Put your phone away. We are constantly accessible with today’s technology, and it makes being present and attentive a real challenge. Choose certain activities or times of the day when you will put your phone away. Even better, turn it off.

Try new things. New adventures open our minds to new perspective, and provide us with a broader range of experiences to pull from when reacting.

Accept your feelings. We do not have to be happy and grateful all of the time. Acknowledge the anger or disappointment in the moment, and move on.

So there you have it. Mindfulness is being present with our thoughts and feelings, accepting them without judgment, and staying in the moment. Give some of these exercises a try, and see how your mood changes. Remember, repeated attempts help us to build a new habit, so keep at it.

<http://meditation-research.org.uk/2014/03/meditation-and-neuroplasticity-five-key-articles/>

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