



read

TRAINING OUR MIND TO BE MORE MINDFUL

WHILE YOU READ, HIGHLIGHT IMPORTANT WORDS/PHRASES AND ANNOTATE THE TEXT USING COMMENTS.

Even a little bit of mindfulness goes a long way. That's according to a study about the effects of mindfulness practice over a short period of time (Tang et al., 2007). Students at Dalian University of Technology in China were randomly assigned to five weeks of training that consisted of 20 minutes of mindfulness meditation a day. Compared to the control group, the experimental group showed improvements in executive function/cognitive control, increased self-reported energy/activity on a scale of mood states, and decreased physiological stress-related responses.

These exciting findings are very relevant because they illustrate that people who haven't been practicing mindfulness for very long can still reap its benefits. But how is that possible? In his article on mindfulness training and neural integration, Dan Siegel proposes that the reason a regular mindfulness practice enhances well-being is that the practitioner develops a more refined understanding of how the mind works (thoughts, emotions, habitual tendencies, etc.). Due to this heightened awareness it "becomes possible to intentionally alter the flow of mental experience." He goes on to say that this could open the door for the mind to be transformed physiologically through mindfulness."

For example, if we can disengage old habits of neural firing from creating their automatic and engrained emotional reactions, such as depression or anxiety, we can reduce mental suffering and enhance the growth in our internal world toward mental health. This shift in the focus of attention—the way we use the mind to channel the flow of energy and information through the various circuits of the brain—changes the pattern of activity in the brain. With repetition, such mindful practice can create intentional states of brain activation that may ultimately become traits of the individual. In neuroplasticity terms this is how new patterns of repeated neural circuit activation strengthen the synaptic connections associated with those states that then lead to synaptic strengthening and synaptic growth. This is the mechanism by which practice harnesses neural plasticity to alter synaptic connections in a way that transforms a temporary state into a more long-lasting trait of the individual.”

References: Tang, Y.-T., Ma, Y., Wang, J., Feng, S., Lu, Q., Yu, Q., Sui, D., Rothbart, M.K., Fan, M., & Posner, M.I. (2007). Short-term meditation training improves attention and self-regulation. *Proc Natl Acad Sci.*, 104, 17152-17156. Siegel, D. J. (2007). Mindfulness training and neural integration: differentiation of distinct streams of awareness and cultivation of well-being. *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, 2, 259-263.

MAINTAIN A MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

Even though we know the benefits and can see the relevance in our life, it can still be difficult to maintain a mindfulness practice. Big life changes come, different stresses emerge, and new relationships form. These are all good times to have a mindfulness practice but often these are precisely the times when we struggle most to find time. Even when nothing major is going on in our lives, sometimes we simply forget. I find it helpful to have a few tricks up my sleeve to keep me on track with a daily practice. Here are a few that I've found helpful from time to time.



Create Consistency: Carving out 20 - 30 minutes a day to practice mindfulness is actually not a lot of time when one considers there are 24 hours in a day, but it can still feel like a lot to commit to. Find a time that fits naturally into your daily routine. If you are a really busy person without a consistent routine, actually schedule it into your day on your daily planner, calendar, or phone. Block out the time and stick to it; making it a priority. Don't forget that you can split the time up if needed. Sitting two times a day for 10 minutes can be very beneficial too.

Leave a Note: I am often at a computer for work and have found it helpful to have sticky note to remind me to take some breaths or to practice at a certain time. You can leave notes anywhere: on the dash of your car to remind yourself to take five minutes of mindfulness before driving home from work, or your bathroom mirror to be mindful while brushing your teeth, or next to your bed to do a body scan before falling asleep. Be resourceful and do whatever you think will help to remind you to bring more awareness into your life.

Buddy Up: It can be very helpful to practice with someone you know. You can either physically sit together or just remind each other to practice via email, phone call, or text. Choose someone who will motivate you as well as be open to talking about how practice is going. This can be a great thing to share with good friend. You may also consider getting a group together to sit every week. There is something very powerful about sitting with a large number of people. People report it being easier to get grounded while others say they feel more encouraged to sit longer. I've seen groups form book clubs that read and discuss mindfulness-based literature after a period of sitting practice. You can get creative with it!

Easing the Intention: Set yourself up for success. Sometimes well-intended goals like sitting every morning for 30 minutes don't always work out or can even get overwhelming. If you notice that getting into a routine of mindfulness practice has been difficult or is adding strain to your relationship with your practice, set the bar a little lower. This is not cheating or failing. In fact, it can be a great way to get you re-motivated. Start by just deciding to sit in a mindful posture everyday for 10 breaths. That's it! Once you are there doing it, if you decide that you'd like to stay longer than 10 breaths, you can. Some days you might find that setting the intention to sit 30 minutes is no big deal. Allow yourself to flow with whatever supports you getting the practice you need for that particular day.



WATCH THIS!

BE HERE NOW

PAST CAN'T CHANGE | **FUTURE** CAN'T PREDICT

60,000 thoughts a day

MINDFULNESS

MOMENT BY MOMENT AWARENESS

THOUGHTS | FEELINGS | BODY | ENVIRONMENT

NO JUDGMENT

WHY?

- RELIEVE STRESS
- IMPROVE FOCUS
- LESS EMOTIONAL REACTIVITY
- MANAGE PAIN
- REDUCE ANXIETY
- IMPROVE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE
- BECOME MORE COMPASSIONATE
- SLEEP BETTER
- CULTIVATE
- ENJOY

MEDITATION

USE YOUR **BREATH** AS THE ANCHOR for AWARENESS

Johnine Byrne seeyourwords.com

CLICK [HERE](#) OR ON THE IMAGE ABOVE TO WATCH A VIDEO

WHAT DO YOU THINK ?
WHAT INFORMATION FROM THE VIDEO IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTANDING THE SCIENCE OF MINDFULNESS?



GUIDED MEDITATION • Click [HERE](#) (30 min)

Mindfulness Practice Log		
Date	Time/# of Minutes	Journal • Reflection • Questions