

Mindfulness over matter

Combatting stress through self-awareness

No matter who you are, stress is most likely a part of your life. The key is learning how to identify it and manage it. Many doctors are pointing to mindfulness as a method for successfully controlling stress before it controls you.

What are the warning signs of stress?

The warning signs of stress aren't something to take lightly. They are signs that your body and mind need extra care. These signs include:

- Headaches, muscle tension, neck or back pain
- Upset stomach
- Dry mouth
- Chest pains, rapid heartbeat
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite or overeating "comfort foods"
- Increased frequency of colds
- Lack of concentration or focus, memory problems or forgetfulness
- Jitters
- Irritability or short temper
- Anxiety

Grab a mobile device and breathe deeply

If you have a smartphone or mobile device, there are a number of free apps that can help you in your mission to be more mindful.

Search *mindfulness* in your app store.

Ways to reduce stress

Guided imagery: relaxation, aided by imagination.

Guided imagery uses words and music to help guide your imagination toward a relaxed, focused state. An instructor, tapes or scripts can help you through this process. You can use guided imagery to imagine a safe, comfortable place, like a beautiful beach or country road — a place where stress is not top of mind.

Deep breathing: one of the best ways to lower stress in the body.

When you breathe deeply, taking slow deep breaths, it sends a message to your brain to calm down and relax. The brain then sends this message to your body. Relaxation combats the symptoms of stress, such as an increased heart rate, fast breathing and a rise in blood pressure.

Mindfulness: focus on the here and now.

Mindfulness is a mental state achieved by focusing your attention on the present, and what you are sensing at that moment. By focusing on the here and now, you are less likely to get caught up in worries about the future or regrets over the past.

Mindfulness is often learned through meditation, which is a method of controlling your attention by focusing on your breathing, a phrase or an image. The key to mindfulness is allowing thoughts to come and go without judging them.

How to practice mindful meditation

Most mindful meditation is done seated. One way to practice it is through a mental “body scan.” To do this:

- Sit up straight in a chair with both feet on the floor and your hands on your thighs.
- Close your eyes.
- Pay attention to your breath as you inhale and exhale.
- Focus on your forehead, then the bridge of your nose, your cheeks, and so on down your body until you reach your toes.
- As you “travel” down your body, focus only on the sensations in one part of the body and let all other thoughts go.

Sources:

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