

Key Points

- Psychologist Albert Ellis identified 12 irrational ideas, called thinking errors, which can create and add to stress.
- Several cognitive techniques, including positive self-talk, thought-stopping, power language, and going with the flow, can be used to help prevent and reduce stress.
- Conditioned-response theory proposes that when things happen in our environment, we are conditioned to respond in certain ways.
- Conscious choice gives us the capacity to choose a healthy response to stressful events.
- The levels of responding concept explains the range of responses, both effective and ineffective.
- Rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) is based on the premise that stress-related behaviors are initiated by self-defeating perceptions that can be changed.
- A method of coping with anxiety that consists of examining irrational beliefs is called the ABCDE Technique.

Key Terms

pessimism
awfulizing
cognitive therapy
self-talk
stream of consciousness
thought-stopping

learned optimism
optimists
pessimists
power language
going with the flow
conditioned-response theory

levels of responding
rational emotive behavior
therapy
practical problems
emotional problems
ABCDE technique

Notes

1. *Learned Optimism*, by M. Seligman (New York: Knopf, 1991).
2. *Awaken the Giant within: How to Take Immediate Control of Your Mental, Emotional, Physical and Financial Destiny*, by A. Robbins (New York: Summit Books, 1991), p. 211.
3. *Man's Search for Meaning*, by V. E. Frankl (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963), pp. 103–104.
4. *As A Man Thinketh—FREE EBook—Timeless Classic* by James Allen. Accessed 16 Apr. 2011. <<http://www.asamanthinketh.net>>.
5. *A Guide to Rational Living*, by A. Ellis and R. Harper (North Hollywood, CA: Melvin Powers, Wilshire Book Co., 1975).

7/Mindfulness

I have so many things going on every day, but they are *all* very important to me. How can I do all of them and enjoy each one rather than get so stressed about having so much to do?

I think of mindfulness as living in the moment. If I do this, how can I plan for the future and accomplish my goals?

How does mindfulness relate to meditation?

Does mindfulness mean living recklessly for the moment?

REAL PEOPLE, REAL STORIES

Trina's Story: A Mindful Moment

When students were discussing what they had learned from their assignment on mindfulness, Trina made a profound statement: "I looked everywhere for what was missing in my life, and I found out it was me." She went on to explain that she came to realize that she was almost never "in the moment." She was missing out on the moments of life because her mind was somewhere else—worrying about something that might happen or what she had to do or feeling guilty about something she had done in the past. Mostly, her mind was so full of thoughts of what she had to get done that she rarely focused on the moment at hand. Through deliberately applying the qualities of mindfulness to her daily life, Trina was able to find what was missing—herself.

Ten thousand flowers in spring,
The moon in autumn,
A cool breeze in summer,
Snow in the winter,
If your mind is not clouded by
unnecessary things,
This is the best season of your life.

—WU-MEN,

12TH-CENTURY CHINESE SCHOLAR

CHAPTER SEVEN

Ryan shared this story about his experience with mindfulness: On my three mile run around my neighborhood, I usually run with my iPod, but decided today I would turn off my iPod and tune in to my surroundings. As I ran, I noticed how the cold felt hitting my legs and how the wind was blowing so hard. I noticed the yellow, orange, and brown leaves in the trees. I heard birds chirping. I noticed how hard it was to run against the wind and how it pushed me when I was in stride with it. I noticed my feet hitting the ground, making a drum sound, and how comfortable my shoes were. I noticed the smell of crisp fall air. I noticed how much I like the outdoors and being surrounded by nature. I noticed the grey clouds in the sky. I noticed a lady getting out of her car and smiling at me as she walked to her house. I noticed the whipping of American flags in

three different yards. I noticed how my hands got warm in my gloves toward the end of my run. My thoughts were completely focused on my surroundings. The workout was fast and easy, and I felt calm, focused, and free! I felt during this run so much enjoyment! It made me love running even more. It felt like I was taken to another world for a half hour with nothing else on my mind but what I was taking in with my senses. I was so focused on my surroundings and the beauty of nature that I forgot about anything I have coming up or that has happened in my life.

Both Trina and Ryan learned that stress can be prevented and life can be improved by conscious, present-moment awareness and a mindful approach to living.

Student Objectives

Study of this chapter will enable you to:

1. Explain the relationship between mindfulness and reality.
2. Distinguish between mindfulness and mindlessness.
3. List the qualities of mindfulness.
4. Explain the benefits of mindfulness.
5. Experience mindfulness as a tool to unclutter the mind and bring about mental tranquility.

Mindfulness

Two monks were walking through the woods when they came upon a woman standing by a stream. "Please, sir, would you kindly help me across the stream?" she asked. One monk silently nodded his head, hoisted the woman on his back, and walked across the stream with her. She bowed, thanked him, and walked on. The two monks watched her walk out of sight and then continued on their journey. Many miles and hours later the monk who had not carried the woman said, "I've been thinking, how could you have touched that woman? You know our order frowns on touching women." The other monk smiled and said, "I put her down a long time ago. Why are you still carrying her?"

The Nature of Reality

We begin our discussion about mindfulness with this question: What is reality? Or to ask it a slightly different way, what is real? You might say that reality includes our thoughts, our dreams, our desires, our imaginations, God, and the physical stuff that surrounds us.

A simple definition of **reality**, which we will use for the purposes of this text, is this: Reality is *what is*. Reality is *what is happening*. **Unreality**, then, is what is not (happening). Some people call unreality illusion.

How do we determine what reality is? Put another way, how do we know what is happening? The answer is found in two places.

The first place to locate reality is through our senses. The sounds we hear are reality. We see a bird flying and clouds floating behind the bird. This view of what we are seeing is reality. When we touch the top of the table with our hand, the sensation of touch tells us of the hardness of the table. We hear a dog barking, or we smell chocolate chip cookies baking in the kitchen. The word that clues us in to reality is *experience*. What we are experiencing is reality. The book you are reading right now is reality.

A second place we can look to find out *what is happening* is internally. Many sensations are happening right now within us. Sensations such as balance, equilibrium, and physiological processes such as digestion, our heart beating, and breathing, all are examples of our internal experience. The things that are *not* reality are the things we make up, our judgments, our opinions, or ideas *about* our experience. For example, we see a car driving at a certain speed in front of us. That is reality. Our senses of sight and hearing and the inner sensation of movement through space capture the information about what is happening in our environment.

Ideas that we create in our minds about this situation are not reality. These thoughts are our own creations about the situation. We might think that the slow-driving person ahead of us is old and incapable of driving properly, that this person is keeping us from getting to where we want to go at a faster pace, and that old people should not be on the road in the first place. These are thoughts we make up about the situation, not the reality of what *is happening*.



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Reality is what we experience here and now with our senses

The Here and Now

The next question is not difficult but it is one whose answer we often forget, which can lead to much stress: Where are you right now? The only correct answer to this question is *here*. Where are you *not* right now? The only correct answer is *everywhere else*. How do you know you are *here*? Because your senses, your experience, verify that this is the case. Right here is reality.

At what point in time are you? The only correct answer to this question is—*now*. At what point in time are you *not*? The correct answer to this question is your *future* and your *past*. This moment right now is reality.

Every moment of our life, we are in our here and now. That is all life is for each of us—successive present moments of *here-and-now* experiences. It will never be different for anyone. This is reality. You cannot transport yourself into your past or your future. You also cannot possibly be somewhere else than right *here*. Certainly, you may do so in your mind, but based on our discussion of reality, that is your creation, something you are making up.

Alan Watts spoke of this here and now concept this way:

Take it that you are not going anywhere but here, and that there never was, is, or will be any other time than now. Simply be aware of what actually is without giving it names and without judging it, for you are now feeling out reality itself instead of ideas and opinions about it.¹

So what does all of this have to do with managing stress?

Wherever you go, there you are.

—Lao Tzu

Understanding Mindfulness

Understanding the concept of mindfulness will help us understand how to become more focused on the present moment and, as a result, more relaxed and peaceful. **Mindfulness** is commonly defined as the state of being attentive to and aware of what is taking place in the present.² Mindfulness is the process of cultivating appreciation for the fullness of each moment we are alive. It is present-moment awareness. When we are mindful, we are paying attention, on purpose, non-judgmentally. It is an acceptance of present-moment reality. It is waking up to the fact that our lives unfold only in moments.

But why is it so important to devote an entire chapter to our ability to focus on the present moment? Why do we need to consider the fact that our experience of here and now is our only reality? Because *there is no stress in the present moment*. When our attention is focusing directly on this here-and-now moment, there is no threat, and the result is no stress. But we aren't trained to think in this way. This chapter will finally teach you how.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder and director of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, described mindfulness as a conscious discipline that can be explained as the intentional cultivation of non-judgmental moment-to-moment awareness.³ Mindfulness may be thought of not so much as a technique but as a way of life. Mindfulness approaches are not considered relaxation techniques but, rather, a form of mental training to reduce vulnerability to reactive modes of thinking that heighten stress and emotional distress.⁴ The result is that stress can be prevented through conscious living.

Mindfulness is based on the ancient contemplative tradition called **vipassana**, which means "seeing clearly." Mindfulness is the process of learning how to be fully present in all experiences while being less judgmental and reactive. Mindfulness practices include self-reflection, acceptance, self-care, and opening to difficulties without avoidance. Mindfulness suggests being present in the here and now, attending to and listening for whatever arises, and remaining focused and relaxed.⁵

We can begin to understand mindfulness with an example of how we function mentally when we are driving our car and notice that a police officer is driving immediately behind us. His lights are not flashing to pull us over. He is just following us. When we drive with this level of alertness, we are completely aware of everything that is going on. We are aware of the distance between our car and the one in front of us. We are aware of how fast we are driving. We are totally aware of aspects of driving such as how soon before the intersection we will have to turn on the signal to indicate that we are making a turn, how quickly we shift lanes, if our lights are on, and slowing down to the proper pace. In essence, we are completely tuned in to our immediate environment.

Mindlessness, by contrast, is demonstrated when we are driving along a stretch of road, and before we realize it, we have traveled 15 miles and have no idea about the stretch of road we have just driven. We suddenly catch ourselves and marvel that we didn't have an accident for failing to pay attention. **Mindlessness** occurs when our thoughts are not in the present moment and when we tune out what is happening. Our mental focus is on times and places other than the here and now. We ignore the present moment because our attention is focused elsewhere. This is what Trina was talking about in our opening vignette when she said, "I looked everywhere for what was missing in my life and I found out it was me."

Qualities of Mindfulness

The focus of mindfulness is on the experience. Professor Stefan Schmidt, of the University of Freiburg in Germany, identified attitudinal qualities that facilitate mindfulness, including *beginner's mind*, *non-judging*, *acceptance*, *non-attachment*, and *non-striving*.⁶ These five qualities can be cultivated as you develop a more mindful approach to life.

Beginner's Mind: Thinking Like a Child Mindfulness suggests openness in how we observe experiences. Rather than observing experiences through the filter of our beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and desires, mindfulness involves seeing things "as if for the first

Man looks without seeing,
listens without hearing,
touches without feeling,
eats without tasting,
moves without physical
awareness, inhales
without awareness of
odor or fragrance and
talks without thinking.

—LEONARDO DA VINCI

time," a quality often referred to as beginner's mind.⁷ It is an observation full of curiosity, interest, and joy.

We can regain the quality of beginner's mind. We say *regain* because this is how young children operate. They don't concern themselves with "what if" and "if only." Consider how silly it would be if a 1-year-old who is learning how to walk starts questioning the notion that walking has advantages over crawling. She starts thinking things such as, "I don't know if I should try this, because if I learn to walk, I'll be much more likely to fall down the stairs, and that will really hurt." Or equally as silly would be this thought, "I fell when I tried walking last time. I'm a rotten walker because last time I tried it, I fell flat on my behind. I might as well give up because I'll never be able to walk." This, fortunately, is not how children think. They look at the present moment, see what's in it, and experience it fully.

Mary Maisey-Ireland shares this story:

She runs barefoot around the yard, arms outspread, hair streaming behind her, face upturned to the rain. I am witnessing radiant, unadulterated joy, completely expressed by my 9-year-old daughter.

I stand transfixed at the kitchen window, soapy plate in my hands, moved by her happiness. She celebrates wind, too. And sunsets and moonrises and flowers and kittens and, well, life.⁸

Gerald Jampolsky explains how our best model for living mindfully is a child:

I have often thought that we have much to learn from infants. They have not yet adapted to the concept of linear time with a past, present, and future. They relate only to the immediate present, to right now. . . . As we become older, we tend to accept the adult values which emphasize projecting past learning into the present and anticipated future. It is difficult for most of us to have even the slightest question about the validity of our past-present-future concepts. We believe that the past will continue to repeat itself in the present and future without the possibility of change. Consequently, we believe we are living in a fearful world where, sooner or later, there will be suffering, frustrations, conflict, depression, and illness.⁹

Jampolsky contends that we can choose to experience this instant as the only time there is, and live in a reality of *now*.

Non-Judging The quality of non-judging represents straightforward observations. It means that one should not infer from what one is observing, and should not evaluate the observation in any way. One should just observe with calmness the immediate experiences as they are.

We can become more mindful by eliminating our need to judge. When



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Celebrating this Moment!

Become Like a Child

Our best model for living a low-stress life would probably be that of a young child. Think of how a child operates in a typical day. His thoughts are always on what is happening right now or what is coming up next.

Here are some more characteristics that are typical of being like a child:

Risk taker	Not threatened by the unknown
Adventurer	Independent
Fun lover	Enjoys privacy
Humorous	Absence of approval seeking
Playful	Knows how to laugh
Creative	Accepts himself and others
Curious	Enjoys and appreciates the natural world
Enjoys being loved	Doesn't engage in useless fighting
Teachable	Honest; doesn't blame others
Trusting	High energy levels
Vulnerable	Not afraid to fail
Likes most things about life	Lack of defensiveness
Free from guilt	
Free from worry	
Lives now, rather than in the past or the future	

It is not likely that you will immediately incorporate all of these traits into your own nature. But by considering each one individually, and by thinking of each trait frequently, little by little, you can develop the qualities that will help you live more freely, more happily, and more contentedly, like a child. For example, when you find yourself in situations where you could choose being a risk taker over being too conservative, if it is appropriate, choose to take the risk.

Source: *Your Erroneous Zones*, by W. Dyer (New York: Avon Books, 1976).

we simply observe, without adding the mental analysis of the situation, we free ourselves to see things more accurately. As we discussed in Chapter 6, we never can judge another person truly accurately. Because we cannot do this, we might as well release our need to judge. We do this by simply staying in an observational state of mind without judgment or expectations.

This is called **detached observation**. Thoughts enter consciousness objectively and without judgment or emotion. A detached and non-evaluative observation is not cold-hearted. Mindful awareness is warm and accepting. Think of it like the mind being a wide movie screen with your thoughts projected on the screen. You observe them without judgment or analysis. The result is often increased awareness.

Awareness is not limited to any one focal point, as is common in many forms of meditation, but, rather, encompasses mind, body, environment, and whatever arises in the field of awareness. The object of focus is not the point. Instead, it is the quality of awareness of what passes through the individual's consciousness. The outcome is a way to experience life directly, without it being filtered through beliefs, expectations, and preconceptions.

Imagine calling someone on the phone. This person is having a particularly rough day. You ask her if she would like to join you for lunch. She snaps back angrily, letting you know she doesn't have time for you, or for lunch. In an instant you notice yourself becoming angry and judgmental about her and the rude way she treated you. The reality of this situation (what is happening) is that she said some words to you about not going to eat lunch with you. All the misguided things you conclude about her, all the judgments you create about her, are what you make up but *are not what is happening*. Her anger had nothing to do with you, but your mind races with all of the thoughts about her and your apparently faltering relationship. Letting go and not judging means simply dropping the need to have all of those unnecessary and inaccurate thoughts racing through your mind.

Mindfulness self-efficacy relates to this question: "How confident are you that your ability to maintain moment-to-moment non-judgmental awareness will keep you peaceful?" Think about situations that represent common sources of stress that can interfere with experiencing non-judgmental awareness. This might include frustration during goal-oriented activities (such as shopping, driving, and school); interpersonal problems and receiving criticism; and physical or health stressors (such as fatigue, pain, sleep, and hunger).

Researchers Frederic Luskin and Mark Abramson¹⁰ have developed a mindfulness self-efficacy scale to help individuals assess their confidence in their ability to maintain non-judgmental awareness. You can rate your confidence in handling similar situations such as those presented in the Stress Busting Behavior feature.

Stress Busting Behavior

MINDFULNESS IN DAILY LIFE

Mindfulness self-efficacy is your confidence in your ability to remain mindful and "in the moment" when you encounter potentially stress-producing events throughout the day. The moment-to-moment non-judgmental awareness can help keep you peaceful, but it takes practice. Check those situations where you feel confident in your ability to remain calm, non-judgmental, and in the moment.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> When you wait in the express line at the grocery store as the person in front of you has too many items | <input type="checkbox"/> When you are having trouble sleeping and have a big test the next day |
| <input type="checkbox"/> When you are hungry and see yourself reaching for junk food | <input type="checkbox"/> When your boss is telling you that you have done a task incorrectly |
| <input type="checkbox"/> When your teacher gives you an extra assignment due by the next class | <input type="checkbox"/> When someone you love hurts you deeply |
| <input type="checkbox"/> When you have a fight with a friend | <input type="checkbox"/> When the person next to you in the restaurant is speaking loudly on his cell phone |
| <input type="checkbox"/> When you are caught in slow traffic | |

Imagine yourself in these or other situations where you might experience stress. Think deliberately about how you can apply mindfulness to that situation by simply observing and being aware, rather than reacting in a stress-producing way. Imagine how different your experience with stress will be. As you practice mindfulness and apply it in your daily life, your self-efficacy will increase.

Acceptance of What Is Happening Non-judging is the basis for accepting what is happening. Acceptance is holistic and unconditional. Acceptance means we acknowledge experiences as they are. To bring our focus more into the present, we can simply turn off the mind chatter that is racing through our minds of what is not happening—about the future and the past, about thinking we always have to be somewhere else, about our opinions, judgments, and things we make up about an event. It is attending to and allowing what is happening now.

Ron Smotherman commented on the usefulness of mindfulness in saying:

All the confusion clears up when we realize that there is only one “time” and that time is *now*. If you are willing to experience the truth that it is right now, your “problems” about the past and future will clear up. Why? Because there is no past or future; there is only right now. If you are stuck in what you call the “past,” you are stuck right now. If you spend your time daydreaming about the “future,” you do that process right now. You can’t even go to these places called the “past” and the “future.” They are not real.¹¹

We also can simply attend to *what is* with all of our senses. It is almost a passive observing of what is happening around you. We observe, we notice, we watch, we become sensory-aware of what is happening in our environment. When we notice ourselves getting wrapped up in our thoughts, we simply step back and let the moments unfold, observing and not trying to change anything. We allow ourselves to be content, to be sufficient with this moment.

Non-Attachment The quality of non-attachment refers to non-identification with the object of our attention. It means not getting carried away with thoughts or feelings and not holding onto experiences. The observation is detached from the object.

Research HIGHLIGHT

Daydreaming—Is It Good For You?

Daydreaming—we all do it, and more than you might imagine. The human mind is remarkably good at straying from the moment. That ability allows us to remember the past, plan for the future, and “even imagine things that never occur at all,” says Matthew Killingsworth, a doctoral student in psychology at Harvard University. “People spend a lot of time with their minds wandering and that seems to be damaging for their happiness. The ability to think about things other than the present is a uniquely human trait, and seems to come with an emotional trade-off,” Killingsworth said.

In a new global study reported in the journal *Science*, the first thing the Harvard researchers noticed was just how often people weren’t thinking about what they were doing. Over all, subjects’ minds were wandering about 47% of the time. People spend almost half of their waking hours thinking about something other than what they are doing, and their daydreaming usually doesn’t take them to a happy place.

The researchers used iPhones to gauge the mental state of 2,250 adults several times a day. They randomly contacted volunteers throughout the day and had them describe what they were doing, what they were thinking about, and how they felt

on a scale of zero to 100. People who were daydreaming often reported feeling sad or worried. People who were intensely focused on what they were doing at that moment tended to report feeling much happier.

The study results indicate that, if you want to stay cheerful, you’re better off focusing on the present, no matter how unpleasant it is. The daydreaming was not good for people’s moods: People were unhappier when their thoughts were elsewhere. By analyzing the data over time, the researchers discovered that people didn’t merely fantasize when they were unhappy; instead, wandering minds led to unhappiness. Statistical tests showed that mind-wandering earlier in the day correlated with a poorer mood later in the day, but not vice versa, suggesting that unhappiness with their current activity wasn’t prompting people to mentally escape. Instead, their wandering minds were the cause of their gloom. Mental drifting was a downer for subjects during even the duller activities, like cleaning, the researchers found. “I’m sure there are some situations where mind-wandering can be helpful,” says Killingsworth. But based on these results, those “are probably pretty rare.”

Source: “Science Now: Daydreaming Is a Downer,” by Lauren Schenkman, *Science*, <http://news.sciencemag.org/sciencenow>, accessed November 11, 2010.

Physician William Thomas says that simple observation has led him to regard life as the dynamic and unfolding interplay between the state of “being” and the state of “doing.” He explains how, as a function of culture and shared expectations, we move through transitions starting with infants, who are the purest form of being. Adolescence is a transition to adulthood, from the joyfulness of play to a preference for *doing* over *being*. In adulthood the emphasis on doing over being increases. One of the first questions adults ask when they meet is “What do you do?”

Thomas says, “Elderhood brings us full circle to a life that favors being over doing. This is a gift of great value. Watching older and younger people together, you get the

sense of a secret collusion that excludes adults. I remember visiting a nursing home that also had a child daycare center. A group of older people and children were painting flowerpots when the adult overseer announced that time was up. All but one of the children trooped out of the room. Andrew, who was curled up in an elder’s lap, wouldn’t move. As he was being prodded to leave, I heard him say, ‘I want to be with Frank.’ The time they were spending together soothed them both. The adults could not be expected to understand.”

Source: “The Search for Being,” by W. Thomas, *AARP Bulletin*, November 2004, pp. 30–31.

This concept of being mindful hit me with such power on one occasion that it changed my entire outlook on life. I was in the middle of work on my bachelor’s degree and was preparing to take a major test for one of my classes. Much of my grade for the class, and ultimately for my succeeding in that major, depended on this test. I studied like a madman for this test. I thought I knew all I needed to know.

The day came to take the test. I parked my car and walked to the testing center. Talk about stress—300 people in a large room all doing nothing but taking tests! I gave the person my ID card. I got my test and Scantron answer sheet and found a little desk, where I would spend the next few hours. It was a tough test, but I thought I knew the material. Finally I finished and turned in my completed test. I waited a few minutes, and then got my results.

Sheer anger, horror, regret, and anguish all hit me at once as I saw that I had gotten a *D* on this test. “How could this professor have been so evil?” “I can’t stay in the major with a *D* hanging over me!” “What am I going to do now?” These and a multitude of similar-sounding questions and derogatory remarks flew through my head like a river gushing down a steep mountain.

As I was walking back to my car in this sour state, I happened to look up. It was late October and the trees were changing colors. Off in the distance, to the west, the sun was getting ready to set and its reflection was bouncing off the large lake that rested on the other side of the city. Looking the other way, to the east, the enormous mountains reflected the hues of the setting sun in a way that made them look flaming reddish-gold. Nature offered me an extremely spectacular sight that afternoon.

In that moment I caught myself in my tirade of unpleasant thoughts. It occurred to me that I had a choice. I could continue to work myself into a frenzy over this test, which was over, and my now uncertain future, or I could stop and watch this beautiful scene of dazzling colors, of trees, mountains, lake, sunset, and unparalleled beauty in front of me. Fortunately, I chose to sit on a bench and watch that wondrous event of day turning to evening. After it was complete, I walked to my car in a most peaceful state of mind. I was different. I somehow knew that everything would turn out fine.

—MO

This important aspect of mindfulness involves resisting the need to cling emotionally to anything—ideas, events, or periods of time to which we release our attachment. We give up the need for things to be a certain way. We let things be as they are.

Non-Striving The quality of non-striving is not goal-oriented. Non-striving implies giving up our need to try to change anything. We simply give ourselves permission to allow this moment to be exactly as it is, and allow all things to be exactly as they are. For just a moment, we are no longer doing, we are just being. We let go of wanting something else to happen. We let go of our need to *do* anything. We are content with *being*. It has been said that we might more aptly be called “human doings” rather than human beings, as most of us are more inclined to be doing than being.

We live in a culture that encourages doing. By nurturing mindfulness, we can learn to be better at being. Jon Kabat-Zinn said it best: “Mindfulness involves intentionally doing only one thing at a time and making sure I am here for it.”¹²

Let’s look at an example of how Kabat-Zinn’s quote plays out in daily life. Every morning when you wake up, you take a ten-minute shower. During those ten minutes you can be thinking about all you need to do that day. You can worry about the psych test you have to take, and you can feel guilty that you watched a movie last night instead of studying. Or you can spend that same ten minutes being fully aware and present in the moment. You can enjoy the feel of warm water and the smell of the soap. You can listen to the water running and notice that you relax

when the water hits your shoulder muscles. You can be grateful for hot and cold running water. Either way, you have spent ten minutes of your life in the shower. The result can be that you are barely aware of the experience and come out feeling rushed and stressed, or you can come out having had a pleasant experience, feeling relaxed and refreshed. Every bit of the rest of your day can follow this same pattern.

Mindfulness as a Way of Being

Mindfulness can be practiced in all facets of daily life by bringing awareness to all activities and to all experiences. Mindfulness in daily life simply means being present in all of one's activities and interactions.

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, spoke about mindfulness when he said:

If while washing dishes, we think only of the cup of tea that awaits us, thus hurrying to get the dishes out of the way as if they were a nuisance, then we are not “washing the dishes to wash the dishes.” What’s more, we are not alive during the time we are washing the dishes. In fact we are completely incapable of realizing the miracle of life while standing at the sink. If we can’t wash the dishes, the chances are we won’t be able to drink our tea either. While drinking the cup of tea, we will only be thinking of other things, barely aware of the cup in our hands. Thus we are sucked away into the future—and we are incapable of actually living one minute of life.¹³

Thich Nhat Hanh was speaking of something so completely mundane, so seemingly mindless, to describe his experience of being mindful.

Washing dishes and riding a thrilling roller coaster and every other event in life all offer the opportunity to choose between living fully in the present and experiencing all that is available or focusing on the unrealities of our past and future, which increases our likelihood for avoidable stress. The choice is, once again, ours.

Ken Keyes spoke about this idea when he said:

Serenity is the end—and serenity is also the means—by which you live effectively. By fully tuning in to the now moment in your life, you will discover that you always have enough to enjoy every moment of your life. The only reason you have not been happy every instant is that you have been dominating your consciousness with thoughts about something you don’t have—or trying to hold on to something that you do have but which is no longer appropriate in the present flow of your life. Here and now is the key to the optimal interaction pattern between you and the people and things in the world around you.¹⁴

When we live mindfully, focusing our attention on what is happening here and now, and allowing ourselves to be totally absorbed in the activity at hand, we become more effective and productive, whatever the task, be it skiing down a tricky ski slope or doing our best on a tough test. The extra mind chatter of future and past and the associated emotions of fear, worry, guilt, and anger seem to diminish. As we do this, in as many moments as possible, we begin to understand that there is no other moment in time or point in space but that which is happening here and now.

When we are operating mindfully, we become the witness to the events that are unfolding around us. We simply notice things as they are. The words we use when we are focusing on what is happening in this moment are, “I am noticing . . .” We then allow our senses to bring to our awareness whatever things, people, or situations they come into contact with.

Why Be Mindful?

Focusing on the moment helps to clear the mind of clutter. The mind juggles many thoughts, produced both internally (memories, worry) and externally (conversations, traffic, TV



Mindfulness brings peace to the moment. Don't miss the beautiful moments in life because your mind is elsewhere.

Recently I was at Disneyland with my family. We went on a ride called “California Screamin’,” which was a total blast of a ride. After our turn had ended and we were discussing how much fun we had, it occurred to me why the ride was so much fun. While we were zooming through the twists and turns, the high speeds and the upside-down loops, we had no focus on the future or the past. Our only awareness was of the exhilaration of that moment and what was happening here and now.

Imagine how silly it would have been to be zooming around on this ride, having the time of our lives, and at the same time worrying about whether we would find a parking spot when we went to our hotel, or which restaurant we would go to that evening, and if all of our kids would find something on the menu they would like to eat or if we would have to go somewhere else to please their appetites. Equally absurd would be a thought process that focused on the angry conversation I had with one of my daughters and how I should have been more considerate of her feelings, which led to my own character flaws as a father. If my mind were to go in either direction, I would miss the ride completely. With my thoughts wrapped up with images of future and past I certainly wouldn’t be able to enjoy the thrill of the ride as I flew through its joyous speedy voyage.

—MO

broadcasts), all of which compete for attention. This can lead to a frazzled attempt to concentrate on several thoughts at once. As these thoughts accumulate, our minds get cluttered, and the result is **sensory overload**. Sensory overload is like a blackboard filled to capacity with notes, scribbles, and information that is difficult to organize and understand. A cluttered mind becomes a stressed mind. Practicing mindfulness is like an eraser that cleans the mind's blackboard. Mindfulness unclutters the mind and brings about mental tranquility.¹⁵

Joseph Goldstein, founding teacher of Insight Meditation Society, says:

Cultivating an active mindfulness of one's experience, moment to moment, is the path to awakening: taking a step, standing up, reaching for a door. When we're not mindful, different things happen. We can be going through the daily activities of life completely lost in thinking about the past or the future, about our hopes, our worries, our anxieties—without being present at all.¹⁶

Robert Pirsig said it this way in his book, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*:

Mountains should be climbed with as little effort as possible and without desire. The reality of your own nature should determine the speed. If you become restless, speed up. If you become winded, slow down. You climb the mountain in equilibrium between restlessness and exhaustion. Then, when you're no longer thinking ahead, each footstep isn't just a means to an end but a unique event in itself. This leaf has jagged edges. This rock looks loose. From this place the snow is less visible, even though closer. These are the things you should notice anyway. To live only for some future goal is shallow. It's the sides of the mountain that sustain life, not the top. Here's where things grow. But of course, without the top, you can't have any sides.¹⁷

We can apply anything we do the same way Pirsig describes climbing the mountain. He mentions that we need the top of the mountain—the goal toward which we are shooting. But the important part is where we are on the way to the goal. Every step along the way is where we are. If we leave the focus on each step, we miss what joy, beauty, and wonder it has for us to discover.

Timothy Gallway wrote of the consequences of allowing ourselves to lose focus on the present moment. He was speaking of what happens during a tennis match, but his thoughts apply to most of the situations in which we find ourselves. These are the natural consequences of letting our minds dwell on future and past and elsewhere instead of here and now:

The greatest lapses in concentration come when we allow our minds to project what is about to happen or to dwell on what has already happened. How easily the mind absorbs itself in the world of what-if's. "What if I lose this point?" it thinks; "then I'll be behind 5-3 on his serve. If I don't break his serve, then I'll have lost the first set and probably the match. I wonder what Martha will say when she hears I lost to George." At this point it is not uncommon for the mind to lapse into a little fantasy about Martha's reaction to hearing the news that you have lost to George. Meanwhile, back in the now, the score is still 3-4, 30-40, and you are barely aware that you are on the court; conscious energy you need to perform at your peak in the now has been leaking into an imagined future.¹⁸

One of the Jedi Masters in the *Star Wars* films clues us in to this notion of mindfulness. The trainee Obi-Wan is talking with his master Qui-Gon during a tense moment. Qui-Gon advises him about the mind and where to focus.

Obi-Wan: I have a bad feeling about this.

Qui-Gon: I don't sense anything.

Obi-Wan: It's not about the mission, Master, it's something . . . elsewhere . . . elusive.

Qui-Gon: Don't center on your anxiety, Obi-Wan. Keep your concentration here and now where it belongs.

Obi-Wan: Master Yoda says I should be mindful of the future.

Qui-Gon: But not at the expense of the moment. Be mindful. . . .

Benefits of Mindfulness

You learned in earlier chapters that, apart from those rare events of real danger, we live our present moments without any real threat or danger. The present moment usually involves no concern for stress. Stress occurs only when we allow our minds to think of things other than what is happening in our current experience. We focus our thoughts on potential future

No one imagines that a symphony is supposed to improve in quality as it goes along, or that the whole object of playing it is to reach the finale. The point of music is discovered in every moment of playing and listening to it. It is the same, I feel, with the greater part of our lives, and if we are unduly absorbed in improving them we may forget altogether to live them.

—ALBERT EINSTEIN

events, about the past, and about things that might be happening elsewhere. When we associate any kind of pain or discomfort with those thoughts of other times and places, we initiate the stress response as a natural reaction to the perception of a false emergency. Mindfulness turns off the stress response and, as a result, facilitates relaxation, reduces stress hormones, and boosts the immune system.

In a review of studies investigating the physiological and psychological benefits of mindfulness that focused on Kabat-Zinn's mindfulness-based stress reduction program, author, educator, and researcher Dr. Lyn Freeman concluded:

MBSR may be effective for general stress reduction with nonclinical populations and for managing stress and mood disorders in patients with cancer. The evidence for benefits with clinical populations is suggestive, but more research is needed. On its face, MBSR appears to have great potential as an intervention in clinical and medical settings. Well-designed studies to support the uncontrolled findings must be performed before final conclusions can be drawn.¹⁹

Although the mechanism through which mindfulness enhances psychological and behavioral functioning remains unclear, research indicates that the enhancement of mindfulness is associated with a variety of well-being outcomes such as reductions in pain, anxiety, depression, binge eating, and stress.²⁰

Research that examined the impact of MBSR on perceived stress, positive state of mind, pain, and mindfulness self-efficacy found that, at the conclusion of the MBSR intervention, the participants reported significantly reduced perceived stress and enhanced positive states of mind, compared to baseline results. The researchers concluded that the practice of mindfulness meditation may have helped study participants reduce their perception of stress, maintain non-judgmental awareness during different situations, and experience higher levels of positive states of mind.²¹ A study that explored the relationship between MBSR and stress in college students found that college students who participated in the MBSR intervention reported an increased overall sense of control and utilization of an accepting or yielding mode of control in their lives, two variables that conceptually can be associated with reduced stress.²²

Attending to the present moment simultaneously combines an internal focus and attention to the outer world. Incorporated in mindfulness practice are attitudes such as proceeding without judgment and expectation. Calming the mind and body allows us to gain insight and become aware of repetitive cognitions and feelings as well as habitual behaviors.²³

Mindful Meditation

Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn and his colleagues at the University of Massachusetts, is a participatory wellness program based on mindful meditation. Participants in MBSR are taught how to work with aspects of awareness. MBSR has been used successfully to decrease a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms and increase clients' well-being. Studies with well populations link MBSR to improved physical, emotional, social, and mental health.

Sources: "Evaluation of a Wellness-based Mindfulness Stress Reduction Intervention: A Controlled Trial," by K. Williams, M. Kolar, B. Reger, and J. Pearson, *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 15 (2002): 422–432; "Student Nurse Health Promotion: Evaluation of a Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Intervention," by L. Young, A. Bruce, L. Turner, and W. Linden, *Canadian Nurse*, 97(6) (2001): 23–26.

Research HIGHLIGHT

Does Mindfulness Decrease Stress?

A pilot study of baccalaureate nursing students explored the effects of an eight-week mindfulness-based stress-reduction course on stress and empathy. The course was intended to provide students with tools to cope with personal and professional stress and to foster empathy through intrapersonal knowing.

Participation in the intervention significantly reduced students' anxiety. Favorable trends were observed in a number of stress dimensions including attitude, time pressure, and total stress. The authors concluded that being mindful may reduce

anxiety and decrease tendencies to take on others' negative emotions. By attending to oneself in the present moment, and then expanding one's awareness to include the environment and other people, one paradoxically becomes less focused on oneself.

When students use mindfulness to quiet their minds, bodies, and emotions, and to observe what is present, they may be better able to reach out to distressed clients and respond with empathy without suffering emotional contagion.

Source: "Does Mindfulness Decrease Stress and Foster Empathy among Nursing Students?" by A. Beddoe and S. Murphy, *Journal of Nursing Education*, 43(7) (2004): 305–312.

Because mindfulness involves self-monitoring that helps increase awareness of what is going on from moment to moment, it has been used effectively in a number of stress reduction programs, including those at the University of Massachusetts, Harvard, and the University of Utah.²⁴

Experiencing Mindfulness: Testing the Principle

Whenever our thoughts are not focused on what is happening in the present moment, we increase the chances of activating the stress response. When we turn our mental focus exclusively to what is happening in the present moment, the stress response turns off. Here is an exercise to demonstrate this:

Sit at a desk or table with a pen and piece of paper. Place your non-dominant hand in a position where you can easily see it, and write down everything you notice about your hand. Using your senses of sight, touch, hearing, smell, and even taste, write down everything your senses tell you about your hand. Continue doing this for several minutes. When you think you have gotten everything, stop and observe again with all of your senses, and continue writing.

When students do this in the classroom, a couple of questions facilitate their learning this principle.

1. "How long do you think you could continue doing this and still come up with things to write?" Some reply that they could have gone on for much longer. Others claim that they got it all.
2. (mainly to those who say they wrote down everything about their hand) "How many of you wrote down that you have four fingers and a thumb?" Usually only about 5% to 10% say they noticed that specific detail. This seems so obvious, yet so few notice.

The point of this exercise is not to discover our hands again but, rather, to make an observation. This activity requires students to be totally focused on something here and now. When asked how much stress they felt as they were doing this activity, students report that they did not feel stressed.

This simple activity demonstrates a powerful principle: When we focus our attention on what is happening, when we keep our awareness on the here and now, what we get is an experience without stress. Because stress occurs when we are associating a future pain or discomfort with some event (worrying) and the need to prepare for it with the fight-or-flight response, when we think mindfully, we eliminate the possibility of stress turning on in the first place.

Focusing fully on the present moment is depicted in the Zen story of a monk who was being chased by two tigers. He came to the edge of a cliff. He looked back, and the tigers were almost upon him. Noticing a vine leading over the cliff, he quickly crawled over the edge and began to let himself down by the vine. Then, as he checked below, he saw two tigers waiting for him at the bottom of the cliff. He looked up and observed that two mice were gnawing away at the vine. Just then he saw a beautiful strawberry within arm's reach. He picked it and enjoyed the best-tasting strawberry in his whole life!²⁵

You must live in the present, launch yourself on every wave, find your eternity in each moment. Fools stand on their island opportunities and look toward another land. There is no other land, there is no other life but this.

—HENRY DAVID THOREAU

A Simple Mindful Exercise

This exercise invites you to experience how it feels to be mindful as it has been described to you in this chapter. Follow Stress Management Lab 7.1 at the end of the chapter to guide you in completing this activity. Take about 45 minutes to an hour to do this. *You are not to speak to anyone during this exercise!* You can do it either sitting or walking around, but make sure that you are entirely by yourself, with paper and pen in hand. Anywhere that you find yourself is an appropriate place to practice this exercise. The process is the same regardless of location.

During this time, you will focus entirely on mentally noticing, observing, and sensing what is (reality). You do this by stating to yourself again and again, "I am noticing . . ." or "I am aware of . . ." or "I am sensing . . ." You finish each statement by describing whatever shows up in your present-moment experience.



Mindfulness involves noticing the unfolding of what is happening in your immediate environment.

Tune in both to your senses and to your internal activity (your thoughts as well as physiological and other internal activity) and discover whatever is presented to you. Notice the unfolding of everything before you. Use all your senses to experience mindfully what always has been around you but you may have never really noticed. Don't look for anything—just look. Move your attention back and forth from what your senses present to you to what is happening in your internal environment.

Externally notice everything you see, hear, touch, smell, and even taste. It might help to repeatedly ask, "What do I see *now*?" "What do I hear *now*?" "What do I smell *now*?" "What do I notice about the taste of what's *now* in my mouth?" "What information does my sense of touch bring to me *now*?" (This sense of touch includes every part of your body.)

Internally, observe things such as your breaths and your heart beating. Notice how gravity is keeping you where you are, and combine that with your ability to remain balanced as you move. Tune in to any feelings of physical pain or discomfort, and simply notice these feelings as a detached observer. Internally, you also can focus on the flowing of your thoughts as they come and go (thought-watching). Observe if these thoughts consist of memories, thoughts of the future (plans), or judgments or criticisms about anything. If you notice yourself criticizing or becoming judgmental of the exercise, simply treat those thoughts as you would everything else that you are observing.

Your single function during this time is to explore, watch, and observe. If you have ever just sat and watched a sunset or a sunrise and done nothing more than observe it happen, that gives you a hint of how this process feels.

On your paper, write down everything you notice. Use as many pages as you need. If you begin to get bored or feel yourself resisting the process, stop and just be present with what is, notice what shows up, and then continue writing what you experience. At the conclusion of this activity, complete the questions found in Stress Management Lab 7.1.

Inner Mindfulness Meditation

Inner mindfulness meditation, also called thought-watching, focuses the mind internally rather than externally through the five senses. It differs from other forms of meditation, which suggest that thoughts and images be developed and created to either relax or create positive images (discussed in Chapters 20 and 21). Thought-watching encourages non-judgmental observation of thoughts and images for heightened awareness. One's awareness is not limited to any one focal point but, instead, is allowed to

Many people come to me wondering why they are so stressed. When I give them this exercise to do for 45 minutes to an hour, they write it off as something silly and stupid. They think they should be doing something seemingly worthwhile, something much more important.

My response is usually something like this:

"If you are to ever be at peace, you must come to accept, even embrace, what is happening here and now. And the only way to really experience the present moment is to stop analyzing, stop judging, stop trying to figure everything out, and just look. Just stop and observe. *To be fully present in this moment is to be at peace. To be out of this moment, thinking we are somewhere else, doing something else is precisely why we feel so much stress.* To say this is a silly exercise is to say life is silly. Look at your experience. There is never a time when it is not this moment, right here, right now.

"All of life consists of successive moments of the present. We always can choose what we want to see in this moment. To choose to be mindful instead of mindless is wisdom of the highest order. In my mind, it is one of the grand keys to becoming peaceful, contented, and stress-free. But it must be practiced. So practice, for the rest of your life, because that is all you have—this moment."

—MO

"I was first introduced to the idea of mindfulness in my stress-management class and it became a major time-saver for me. One of our assignments was to actually try being mindful during some activity of our choice. I was feeling a lot of frustration and stress about the amount of time I spent studying for my algebra class. I was especially stressed because even though I spent lots of time studying for this class, I wasn't getting good grades on the tests. So I decided to give it a try and be mindful while I studied.

It helped that I went to the library and found a quiet study area. I started by closing my eyes and taking a couple of deep breaths. I focused on being present in the moment—right here, right now. I opened my book and concentrated on what I was reading. I even tried to picture the important formulas like they were on a movie screen and I was watching them. When thoughts about things other than algebra entered my mind—and they did—I noted the thought and then returned my focus to algebra.

After lots of practice, this has gotten easier. One of the things I learned as I think back is that even though I was spending much more time studying before I used mindful studying, I wasn't really paying attention. I would study at home, often with my music playing, and with constant interruptions. I would get so frustrated. I now accomplish more in a couple of hours of mindful studying than what used to take me most of a day. I feel much less stressed because I feel like the time I spend studying really matters. Plus I'm doing better in school and have more time to do other things I want to do."

—David W.

Regularly Have Fun

When you are doing something you absolutely enjoy, your mind usually leaves the negative stressors behind. When we do our most preferred activities, we are more mindful and focused on the present moment. This focus promotes relaxation.

In our hectic days, we frequently forget to include time for those things that bring us the most joy. We tend to relegate those activities to far lesser importance, as they aren't urgent-action items. Much of the tension we build up at school or at the office can be released by participating in a pleasurable activity away from the source of tension. Including our favorite activities in our planning and goal-setting time assures that we spend moments effectively meeting our deepest needs.

Each of us has activities we would classify as hobbies. Our minds turn to the activity, and we are absorbed in it. Some hobbies require a certain amount of tension, such as sky-diving, river rafting, and rock climbing. This is the kind of stress, however, that causes us to participate at high levels. It is eustress rather than distress. Other hobbies, such as crafts, art, and most sports, allow for mindful experiences.

view one's thoughts as one would view a movie that is happening inside one's own mind, from the perspective of a detached observer.

A mindful meditation proceeds this way: With the eyes closed, take a moment to tune in to your thoughts. Allow yourself to non-judgmentally watch your thoughts as they seem to come and go. As you keep your eyes closed, separate your awareness from the many thoughts that pop in and then leave your mind. Watch how some thoughts come into your awareness from nowhere, and then watch them expand and develop and lead to other thoughts. Watch these thoughts fade away as others replace them. See if you can differentiate thoughts that come and go. Notice that some thoughts focus on the past while others focus on the future. Watch for those thoughts that are making judgments about or are critical of anything.

Continue to watch your thoughts passively as if you were pulling up a chair and sitting next to your thoughts. If you notice judgmental thoughts about this process, passively observe those thoughts you are having as well. If your mind wanders and you lose your focus, gently bring it back. Practice this inner awareness of watching your thoughts for as long as you feel comfortable doing it. Start with 5 minutes, then increase it for as long as 20 minutes. When you are finished, take a little time returning to normal awareness.

Ways to Practice Being More Mindful

The following are some suggestions that you may use in your quest to become more mindful.



Even something as mundane as eating can be a fulfilling experience when you do it Mindfully.

- Choose an activity that you do in a less than mindful way, and focus on involving yourself completely in the experience. For example, practice eating mindfully. Absorb yourself in the sensations that are part of eating. Take in the smells, the tastes, the colors, the textures of the food. Spend time with each bite enjoying chewing—combining saliva with the food, feeling the food as it is transformed from large pieces to tiny sizes as you chew, feeling your food traveling from your mouth to your stomach.

There are other opportunities to practice being fully present in the here and now; you may try commonplace activities such as taking a shower, driving, walking from one place to another, talking to a friend or a family member, or spending time in nature. Compare your experience of being mindful with how you normally operate in these common experiences and see if there is any difference in how you feel and how you relate with the things in your experience.

- Pay attention to things that are happening around you. Rather than thinking about so many things, try simply observing all that is showing up for you in your experience. Just watch, without concern for how you think things ought to be. Observe how things *are*. Do this with all your senses. Notice all the sounds, the different things to see, the textures to touch and feel, the varieties of smells. Be careful to avoid making judgments of what is unfolding before you.
- Consciously speak to yourself, saying something like: "In this moment I allow myself to be here now. I cannot be anywhere else right now, nor can I be in my past or future, so I choose to relax and enjoy what is happening, here and now."
- If you find yourself in a setting that is mundane or always the same, take time to rearrange things. For example, change the layout of your bedroom or other rooms in your house. Changing your scene from time to time allows you to see things in different ways and therefore become more interested and observant of them.

- Take “mindfulness breaks” in which you do nothing but engage yourself in a certain place and time. Nature is an excellent place to practice mindfulness breaks because it offers so much to tune into and experience. The variety, along with the slower pace of nature, adds to our sense of enjoying the moment more fully. Try an “emotional walk-about” in which you walk without caring where you are going and with no purpose in mind other than to be present in the moment.
- Try a new sport or hobby. Totally engage yourself in learning a new skill.
- Change your normal routines slightly. Go to school a different way than you normally do. Bike rather than walk to a close destination. Shop at a different supermarket or drug-store. Eat at a restaurant where you have never eaten before. Each time you experience these out-of-the-ordinary occasions, you open yourself up to new and exciting ways of experiencing life.
- When you are involved in, or notice others engaging in, situations with heightened emotion, step back and simply become an observer rather than becoming emotionally involved in the incident. Become a passive observer, watching what is happening, rather than diving in and getting overly worked up. As you do this, notice that you are much more able to solve problems calmly rather than to create bigger problems by adding to the drama.

Planning for the Future

Mindfulness does *not* mean living with reckless abandon *for the moment*. It means living fully *in the moment*. A discussion on living in the moment and mindfulness frequently raises questions such as: “What are we to do about planning, setting goals, and creating our own future?” and “Where does that fall into this discussion on mindfulness?”

Living mindfully does not mean that you ignore planning for the future or setting goals for what you want to accomplish. Planning for the future and creating goals entail bringing future moments into the present so you can apply appropriate control toward achieving them. This is a visionary process that constructively focuses on the future in this present moment. It is worthwhile and appropriate.

Conversely, worrying about a future event and directing our attention to the potentially painful outcomes of a future event is not productive. Planning involves arranging future events in the way that we prefer. When we plan something, we use our imagination constructively to create a future reality. When we worry about something, we use our imagination destructively. Worry happens when we think of a future event and then, while that image is on our mind, we also add to the image some pain or discomfort that we believe will happen to us as part of that future event. We make up these thoughts and tend to spend our present moments dwelling on them. It is not a very useful way to spend our present moments. Worrying will be covered more thoroughly in the next chapter.

One of the leading social fears in our culture is speaking in front of a group of people. When we *plan* for that event, we carefully pin down all the things we will say and how we will say them. When we worry about the public speech we will be giving, we imagine all the mental spears that those in the audience will throw our way while we are speaking. The difference between worrying and planning is treated more fully in later chapters.

Putting It All Together

Think of mindfulness in two stages. The first stage involves self-regulating one’s attention to maintain it on immediate experience. The second stage requires adopting a certain orientation toward one’s experiences in the present moment, an orientation characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance.²⁶

Although we are not likely to be fully mindful every minute of every day, we can have more moments of mindfulness. Start with one activity in your day—going for a walk, taking a shower, eating lunch, or even studying.

Let him who would enjoy a good future waste none of his present.

—ROBERT BABBARD

Our Daughter’s Simple Reminder

Our daughter’s friend Christy told us about a simple technique she uses to remind her to be more mindful. She carries a special, small, smooth rock with her every day. She keeps it with her keys, so every day when she gets ready to leave for work, she puts it in her pocket. During the day when something stressful happens or she starts to feel tense and feels her mind filling with stressful thoughts, she takes a deep breath and gently rubs the smooth rock. This is a simple reminder to be in the moment. Mindfulness won’t happen by accident. Think about a simple trigger that you can use throughout the day to remind you to be in the moment.

—MH

Deliberately concentrate on being mindful for that time. When we step back and observe our thoughts and feelings, as well as the external environment around us, we gain a new perspective. Mindfulness teaches us to see things as they really are, not the way we think they should be. With practice, mindfulness soon becomes a peaceful way of living.

Finish each day and be done with it. You have done what you could do; some blunders and absurdities have crept in; forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day; you shall begin it serenely and with too high a spirit to be encumbered with your old nonsense.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Conclusion

Mindfulness—the ability to enjoy the present moment—is one of the essentials for stress management, yet this ability to fully experience and appreciate the moment is elusive for many. Learning to practice mindfulness has the potential to reduce one's perception of stress, to enhance one's ability to maintain non-judgmental awareness in stressful situations, and to experience increased levels of positive states of mind.

To be at peace with yourself, learn to replace thoughts that produce unhealthy emotions such as guilt, worry, fear, and anger with a mental focus on the present. Mindfulness combines an internal focus with attention to the outer world. Each day offers thousands of moments to let go and focus directly on the here and now. Benefits result when we learn to separate thoughts and emotions of everyday life from the essence of who we are. As our awareness increases, emotional states lose their power and ability to cause stress. In the words of Thich Nhat Hanh, “Be part of the miraculous moment.”

LAB

7.1 Full Mindfulness Activity

PURPOSE The purpose of this activity is to allow you to experience mindfulness using your ability to observe with all your senses.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY Psychologists tell us that we normally take in about 1% of all of the stimuli that is available to us in any given moment. The primary reason for this is because we simply aren't paying attention. Our thoughts are constantly on other things, other places, other times than here and now. This activity helps us tune in to the other 99% of the stimuli that our senses usually miss. Focusing on the present moment has a profound impact on stress.

DIRECTIONS During this activity, you are going to go somewhere **completely by yourself**. You will *not* talk to anyone. *No speaking allowed!* For about an hour, do nothing but observe. This activity can be done virtually anywhere, but somewhere outdoors may be more appealing.

At the top of your page write “I AM NOTICING . . .” just once, then for an hour finish the sentence over and over based on what your senses bring to you. You will begin each moment with the simple statement, “I am noticing . . .” as you discover all the things that present themselves to you. Use all your senses to experience mindfully what has always been *here and now* but you may have missed because your thoughts were focused on some other time and somewhere else. Don't look for anything—just look. On your paper, write down the things that you observe with each of your senses. If you find yourself getting bored or resisting the process, stop, look, notice what shows up, and then continue.

When you are finished, summarize your experience by responding to the following:

1. What setting did you select for your mindfulness activity? Why?
2. What were some of the main things that you observed, especially those things you wouldn't normally notice?