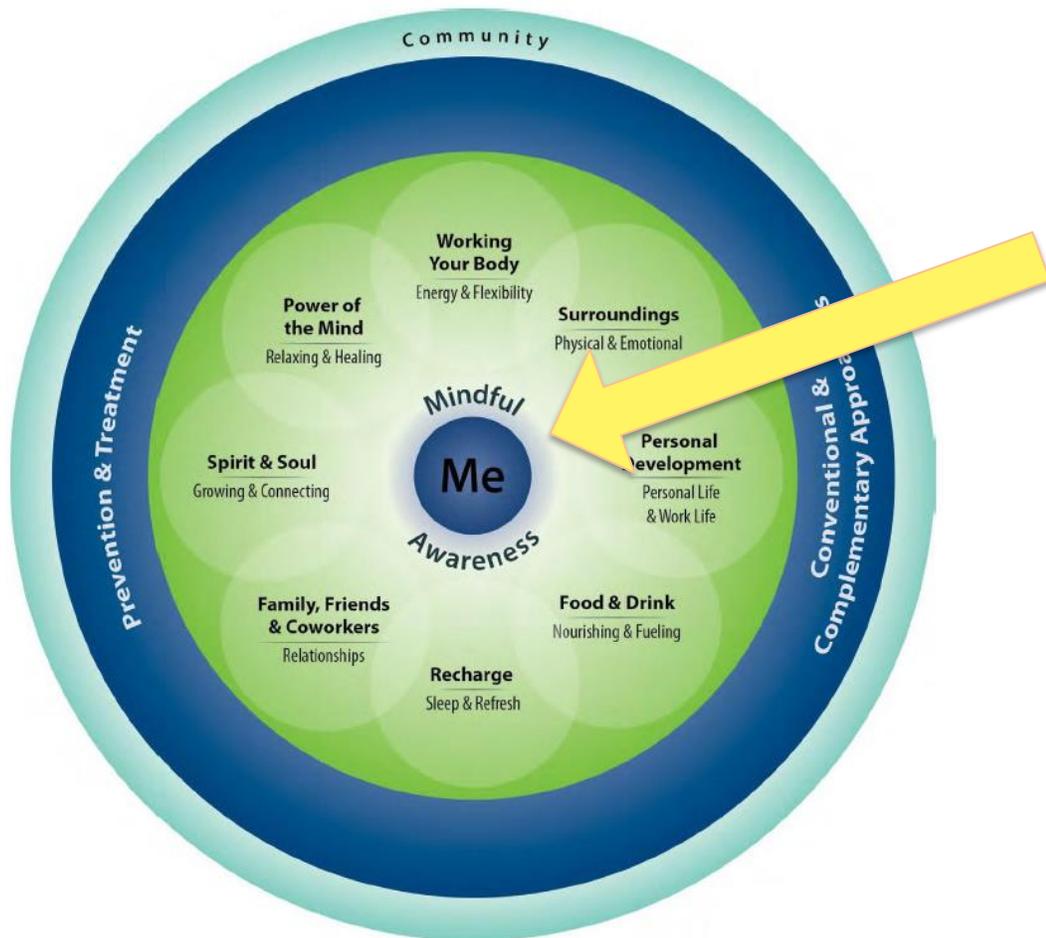


INTRODUCTION TO MINDFUL AWARENESS

WHAT IS MINDFUL AWARENESS?

When you saw the Components of Proactive Health and Well-Being (the “Circle of Health”) for the first time, you might have been struck by the central location of the light blue Mindful Awareness circle. It completely enfolds the “Me” in the center circle. This “Me” may refer to any individual, a patient, a team member or yourself. Just as mindful awareness is central to the Circle of Health, it is central to Whole Health and the Whole Health approach to care.



One way to think about “mindful awareness” is that:

Mindful awareness is being fully aware and tuned in to what is going on right now, in the present moment. It is all too easy to go through life on autopilot, caught up in reliving past events or planning for the future. Mindful awareness involves returning to the present moment, the only time one can actually be alive. It centers on accepting each moment fully just as it is, which can lead to a greater sense of peace and calm. Mindful awareness is our deeper sense of connection to our true selves.

Another common term is “mindfulness.” An often referred to definition is:

Mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.¹

Mindfulness, when used in the general sense of the word, is the same thing as mindful awareness. It is, however, often linked to Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, a specific course developed by the University of Massachusetts which introduces learners to various types of meditation. To avoid confusion with the practice of mindfulness meditation, the Circle of Health uses the term mindful awareness rather than mindfulness. The term “mindfulness” is only used in Whole Health educational materials to refer to a specific approach to meditation training. Keep in mind that meditation is just one of many ways to increase mindful awareness.

To offer some further explanation with respect to the term “meditation” and how that may be considered:

Meditation, in contrast, can be viewed as an approach or practice which can help to cultivate mindful awareness. There are many meditation techniques a person can try, ranging from seated meditations and body scans to compassion meditations, breathing exercises, eating meditations, mantram meditations, and movement-based approaches like tai chi or yoga. Remember that not all meditations focus on cultivating mindful awareness, as described above. Some types focus on relaxation or some other specific goal.

Examples of Mindful Awareness Activities and Mindfulness Practices

- Mindful Breathing
- Mindful Walking
- Mindful Exercise
- Mindful Eating
- Meditation
- Centering Prayer
- Compassion Practice

Informal Practice: bringing mindful awareness to your daily activities

Formal Practice: having a set time and space that you practice mindfulness or another meditation practice

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How might you integrate mindful awareness in your daily life?

2. How can you integrate mindful awareness in your clinical interactions?

RESOURCES

For more on mindful awareness, see the information about the Mindful Awareness module on the Whole Health Library Website.

MINDFULNESS TOOL KIT

Resources from the VHA Mindfulness Toolkit created by Greater Los Angeles under grant from OPCC&CT, produced by Finn Partners for the War Related Illness & Injury Center (WRIISC).

AUDIO FILES

<http://www.va.gov/PATIENTCENTEREDCARE/Podcasts.asp>

[Guided Meditation Podcast: Paced Breathing \(7:50\)](#)

[Guided Meditation Podcast: Mental Muscle Relaxation \(5:01\)](#)

[Guided Meditation Podcast: Mini Mental Vacation \(7:39\)](#)

[Introduction to Meditation with Dr. Greg Serpa \(5 mins\)](#)

[Grounding Meditation \(5 mins\)](#)

[Mindfulness of Breathing Meditation \(10 mins\)](#)

[Mindfulness of Sounds Meditation \(10 mins\)](#)

[Compassionate Breathing Meditation \(10 mins\)](#)

[Loving Kindness Meditation \(10 mins\)](#)

[Body Scan Meditation \(15 mins\)](#)

[Body Scan with Loving Kindness Phrases \(15 mins\)](#)

VIDEO FILES

What is Mindfulness?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JbGe9BpniJo>

Why Mindfulness for the VA?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ui79W7TPdo>

Four Ways to Cultivate Mindfulness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sU-xRVB7rVE>

Beginning a Mindfulness Practice

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zr42pt0kuZE>

Mindfulness and Compassion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgIbYzI2Sjk>

STAR WELL-KIT:

<http://www.warrelatedillness.va.gov/education/STAR/>

EVIDENCE MAP FOR MINDFULNESS:

http://www.hsrd.research.va.gov/publications/esp/cam_mindfulness-REPORT.pdf

Mindful Eating

Eating has far-reaching health consequences for individuals, societies, and the planet. These consequences can be positive or negative depending on our patterns and choices. The following exercise can help you to bring more awareness to your eating behaviors, while helping you to cultivate present-moment awareness.

A MINDFUL EATING SCRIPT

Begin by connecting to your breath and body, feel your feet on the ground and notice your experience in this moment. With your awareness in this moment, notice any thoughts, sensations or emotions you are experiencing. (Pause)

Tune into the awareness or sensation that you have in your body of feeling hungry, thirsty or maybe even feeling full. If you were going to eat or drink something right now, what is your body hungry for? What is it thirsty for? Just pay attention and notice with awareness the sensations that give you this information. (Pause)

Now, bring your attention to the item in your hand and imagine that you are seeing it for the first time. Observe with curiosity as you pay attention and notice the color, shape, texture, and size. Is there anything else that you notice, sense or feel? (Pause)

Imagine what it took for this item to get to your hands: sunshine, water, time, processing, and shipping. You may choose to be aware of gratitude for everyone involved in the cultivation and

preparation of this item of food. You may choose to bring in your own gratitude or spiritual blessing. (Pause)

Now place the item between your fingers and feel the texture, temperature and ridges. You may notice smoothness or stickiness. Again, notice if you have any thoughts, sensations or emotions at this time. Continue to breathe and be fully present in this moment. (Pause)

Take the piece of food and bring it toward your nose and smell with your full awareness. Notice if you have any memories, sensations or reactions in your body. Even before you eat it, you may notice that you begin to have a digestive response in your body just by noticing and smelling. (Pause)

With full awareness of your hand moving toward your mouth, place the object (fruit or chocolate) into your mouth without chewing or swallowing it. Just allow it to be in your mouth, roll it around to different parts of your mouth and tongue. Notice the flavor and texture. Notice the physical sensations within your body, especially your mouth and your gut. Continue to breathe as you explore the sensation of having this item in your mouth. (Pause)

Next take just one bite and notice the flavor, notice the change of texture. Then very slowly begin to chew this piece of food, and notice the parts of your mouth that are involved in chewing. Notice the sound and movement of chewing, as you continue to notice the sensations and flavor. (Pause)

When you are ready, swallow this item and notice the path that it follows from your mouth and throat into your stomach. Notice the sensation and taste that may linger in your mouth. Connect again to your body and your breath and notice your experience in this moment. (Pause)

Next, I invite you to pick up another food item, and choose to eat it however you wish. Noticing your choice and your experience. Notice how it is similar or different. (Pause for 30-60 seconds, and then return to large group discussion about the experience).

The Mindful Eating Script written by Christine Milovani, LCSW, based on information from Kabat-Zinn's book Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness published by Delacorte Press in 2013 and McWatter's article Mindful Eating 101: Eating in the Present Moment available at http://www.drmcwatters.com/files/Mindful_Eating_101.pdf.

Mindful Eating is:²

- Allowing yourself to become aware of the positive and nurturing opportunities that are available through food preparation and consumption by respecting your own inner wisdom.
- Choosing to eat food that is both pleasing to you and nourishing to your body by using all your senses to explore, savor and taste.
- Acknowledging responses to food (likes, neutral or dislikes) without judgment.
- Learning to be aware of physical hunger and satiety cues to guide your decision to begin eating and to stop eating.

Someone Who Eats Mindfully:²

- Acknowledges that there is no right or wrong way to eat but varying degrees of awareness surrounding the experience of food.
- Accepts that his/her eating experiences are unique.
- Is an individual, who by choice directs his/her awareness to all aspects of food and eating on a moment-by-moment basis.
- Is an individual who looks at the immediate choices and direct experiences associated with food and eating: not to the distant health outcome of that choice.
- Is aware of and reflects on the effects caused by unmindful eating.
- Experiences insight about how he/she can act to achieve specific health goals as he/she becomes more attuned to the direct experience of eating and the feelings of health and wellbeing.
- Becomes aware of the interconnection of earth, living beings, and cultural practices and the impact of his/ her food choices has on those systems.

This material was compiled by Shilagh Mirgain, PhD, Senior Psychologist, and Clinical Assistant Professor, Department of Orthopedics and Rehabilitation, University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health, based in part on the Mindful Awareness module written by Adrienne Hampton, MD, which is available on the Whole Health Library Website, <http://projects.hsl.wisc.edu/SERVICE/>. See binder page XXX for more information.

References

1. Kabat-Zinn J. *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. New York: Hyperion; 1994.
2. Altman D, Ahmala D, Baerten C, et al. *The Principles of Mindful Eating*. The Center for Mindful Eating website. Available at: <http://thecenterformindfuleating.org/Principles-Mindful-Eating>. Accessed August 2, 2016.