

Written by Phyllis Kasper, PhD

Finding joy in the present moment



Mindfulness meditation is now officially approved as a valid psychotherapy and counseling tool. Upon reflection, it just takes common sense to see that depression thrives on regrets and anxiety thrives on fears of the future. Therefore, learning to keep the focus of attention on present experience can create peace and joy.

So what is this “mindfulness” concept all about? Mainly, it’s about making a decision to place your awareness on your experience in the moment, and do so without judgmental inner dialogue. One way to do this is to place your awareness on your experience of sensations in your own body. It’s about learning to focus on the present moment rather than on your worries and regrets.

But what about mindfulness of your bodily sensations if you are in pain due to arthritis, an injury or fibromyalgia, for example? Pain can really grab your attention. It can trigger thoughts of, “Why?” and, “What if it gets worse?” If it’s a localized pain, sometimes being mindful of the pain itself without judgment will lessen the pain. This takes practice.

But what if your pain is not localized? Fibromyalgia pain can engulf the entire body, but it might be possible to tune in on an area of your body that feels good. If nothing feels good, try gently stroking your own arm to generate pleasant sensations, or rest a hand over your heart and focus on the warmth of the touch.

Even in very difficult circumstances, we have a choice of where to place our attention. So you can stroll along on a beautiful day looking at the tops of your shoes and muttering to yourself about all your mistakes and resenting people who may have harmed you. On the other hand, you can look up and enjoy the beauty of the day. This is especially important when you are fretting about things that you have zero power to change.

I had a profound experience of this while walking my big, white, fluffy Great Pyrenees along a bluff overlooking Lake Michigan. I was obsessing about problems at work and personal disappointments and feeling overwhelmed. Then I noticed how cheerfully my dog was trotting along and how peaceful the lake appeared. As I changed my focus, I began to feel a profound sense of enjoyment and peace that stayed with me for days. With practice, you can learn to

notice what your attention is focused on, and make choices that bring into focus experiences of joy and peace.

Want to learn more? There is a great five-minute video on YouTube by Jon Kabat-Zinn called, "What is Mindfulness?" Can you spare a few minutes to learn how to profoundly improve your quality of life? If this begins to open your eyes to the possibilities, he has hours of free videos that can train you in mindfulness. He can talk you through your sensations of relaxation throughout the body, or talk you through beautiful video scenery.

For those of us who still prefer books to the Internet, I suggest "Listen to the Drum: Blackwolf Shares His Medicine" by Blackwolf Jones. Blackwolf is a certified addictions specialist working in Green Bay, Wisconsin. He is also an Ojibwe elder and healer. His book makes the case for placing your attention 90 percent in the present, five percent in the past and five percent in the future. Jon Kabat-Zinn's book "Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain and Illness" is another great resource. It teaches mindfulness and how to use it to cope.

Dr. Phyllis Kasper has expertise in anxiety disorders, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, peak achievement, biofeedback, hypnosis, EMDR, cultural diversity and pain management. She can help you use personal empowerment to unleash your best you! For more information, please call her at 920.693.2250 or visit <http://evolveability.com>. She is available at Healthy Connections, 510 E. Wisconsin Ave. in Appleton, 920-257-4601.

Reference: "What Is Mindfulness," <http://youtu.be/HmEo6RI4Wvs>.