

WELLNESS WEDNESDAY TIPS

MANAGING STRESS THROUGH MINDFULNESS

Stress is a normal part of our lives; it can energize and motivate us. However, stress can negatively impact physical, psychological, and emotional well-being when it is prolonged and/or intense. Sources of stress can be external, such as from school, work or relationships or it can be internal, from our thoughts and expectations.

Mindfulness meditation techniques can be beneficial in managing stress, not by fixing the problem, but by focusing on the present moment. It is a nonjudgmental stance that allows you to become aware of your physical sensations and thoughts, what you are currently experiencing.

Mindfulness techniques don't have to be used regularly to be helpful. But don't be fooled by the techniques, which sound easy. The more consistently you practice, the more readily benefits are experienced.

Tips for beginning to learn and practice mindfulness:

1. Set aside time to practice. Even 5 minutes can be beneficial. Set a timer so you don't have to think about when to end. You may want to gradually increase the time spent practicing.
2. Find a quiet place without interruptions and get into a comfortable position.
3. Begin to pay attention to what is happening right now: your breathing, how your body feels, your emotions, your thoughts. Your mind will wander – that's normal. Don't judge your thoughts, but just let them pass through and return your thoughts to the present.

Techniques to try:

1. You might choose to focus on your breathing, with different counting patterns. One pattern is to inhale through your nose to the count of 4, hold your breath for the count of 4, then exhale through your mouth to the count of 8.
2. Pick a word or phrase to repeat to yourself. It can be anything you want.
3. Pay attention to a specific part of your body.

4. A classic exercise is to experience tasting a raisin for several minutes – taste, texture, firmness, etc. Don't chew it!

Often people experience some positive results from practicing mindfulness meditation in a short time. Be open to what happens (don't be judgmental!), continue to use the techniques, and your skill will increase.

Healthy Nurse/Healthy Nation. "The Beginner's Guide to Meditation." Aieda Solomon July 7, 2017.

<https://engage.healthynursehealthynation.org/blogs/8/110>

Psych Central. "1-Minute Mindfulness Exercises." Leonie Stewart-Weeks.

<https://psychcentral.com/blog/1-minute-mindfulness-exercises/>

The Mindful Way Through Stress. Shamash Alidina. Guildford Press. 2015.

YouTube. My Life. How to Practice Mindfulness, Part 1 (series of 5). March 13, 2019.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9pclaN-J6x8>

UIHC Department of Psychiatry offers Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) classes, currently on Zoom. This might be especially helpful during dedicated study time when clerkships and classes aren't scheduled. Info:

<https://uihc.org/mindfulness-based-stress-reduction>

Feel free to contact the MSCC for questions or concerns.

Stay safe and stay healthy!

Liz Schacht elizabeth-shacht@uiowa.edu

MEDICAL STUDENT COUNSELING CENTER osac-mscc@uiowa.edu
319-335-8056 1240 MERF