



MindfulBrain
Make the most of it

MBSR Week 3

Mindfulness of Body in Movement



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Mindful Yoga

Many of us are reluctant to exercise because it involves discomfort or strain, or requires special equipment or others to work out with, or going to a special place to do it. If this has been the case for you, then mindful hatha yoga maybe just the practice you have been waiting for.

The word *yoga* means *yoke* in Sanskrit, and implies a harnessing together and a unifying of body and mind. Yoga is a form of meditation, and when done regularly, is an excellent mind/body discipline for people who wish to move towards greater levels of health.

Hatha yoga consists of postures done mindfully and with awareness of breathing. They are easily learned and have dramatic effects if practiced regularly. The ones we are doing are extremely gentle. Regular practice will increase your musculoskeletal flexibility, strength and balance, as well as help you to enter states of deep relaxation and awareness. Many people experience a greater serenity about life in general, improved circulation, a firmer, trimmer figure, and less illness as a result.

In practicing yoga, you are advised to practice in the same way that you do when meditating, namely maintaining moment to moment awareness, and not striving to get somewhere, just allowing yourself to be as you are, and letting go of any judging of yourself. Move slowly and consciously. Mindful yoga involves exploring your limits but not pushing beyond them. Instead, you play with dwelling at the boundary and breathe. This requires honouring your body and the messages it gives you about when to stop and when to avoid doing a posture because of your particular condition.

Yoga requires no special equipment and can be done almost anywhere. Experiment mindfully

Adapted from: *The Stress Reduction and Relaxation Program Workbook* (Center for Mindfulness)

Home practice – week 3

1. Practice alternating one day the body scan and one day the yoga.
2. Practice awareness of breathing sitting meditation for 2-3 minutes per day.
3. Complete the **Unpleasant Events Calendar**.
4. Become aware of the moment at random times during the day. Notice if you are on automatic pilot or are you disturbed by something. Do you notice that there are things you would rather avoid?
5. Read additional documents.

My best wishes for week 3!



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Homework Record Form – week 3

Record on the Homework Record Form each time you practice. Also, make a note of anything that comes up in the homework, so that we can talk about it at the next meeting.

Day/Date	Comments
Day 1	
Day 2	
Day 3	
Day 4	
Day 5	
Day 6	
Day 7	



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Unpleasant Experiences Calendar

What was the Experience?	Were you aware of the unpleasant feelings <u>while</u> they were happening?	How did your body feel, in detail, during this experience?	What moods, feelings and thoughts accompanied this event?	What thoughts are in your mind now as you write this down?
e.g. Waiting for the cable company to come out and fix our line. Realize that I am missing an important meeting at work.	yes	Temples throbbing, tightness in my neck and shoulders, pacing back and forth	Angry, helpless. %s this what they mean by service?+, %They don't have to care . they have a monopoly+, %didn't want to miss this meeting+	I hope I don't have to go through that again soon.
Day1:				
Day2:				
Day3:				
Day 4				
Day 5				
Day 6				
Day 7				

Source: *The Stress Reduction and Relaxation Program Workbook* (Center for Mindfulness)



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Mindfulness of Breathing Meditation

Settling

1. Settle into a comfortable sitting position, either on a straight-backed chair, or on a soft surface on the floor with your buttocks supported by cushions or on a low stool or meditation bench. If you use a chair, it is very helpful to sit away from the back of the chair, so that your spine is self-supporting.
2. Allow the back to adopt an erect, dignified, and comfortable posture. If sitting on a chair, have the feet flat on the floor with the legs uncrossed. Gently close the eyes if that is comfortable. If not, let the gaze fall unfocused on the floor four or five feet out from you.

Bringing awareness to the body

3. Bring your awareness to the level of physical sensations by focusing your attention on the sensations of touch, contact, and pressure in your body where it makes contact with the floor and with whatever you are sitting on. Relax the tension in the body.

Focusing on the sensations of breathing

4. Now bring your awareness to the changing patterns of physical sensations of the breath. There is no need to try to control the breathing in any way - simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can, also bring this attitude of allowing to the rest of your experience - there is nothing to be fixed, no particular state to be achieved - as best you can, simply allow your experience to be your experience without needing it to be other than it is.

And if the mind wanders ò ò ?

5. Sooner or later (usually sooner), the mind will wander away from the focus on the breath to thoughts, planning, daydreams, drifting along - whatever - this is perfectly OK - it's simply what minds do - it is not a mistake or a failure. When you notice that your awareness is no longer on the breath, gently escort the awareness back to the breath sensations. As best you can, bring a quality of kindness to your awareness, perhaps seeing the repeated wanderings of the mind as opportunities to bring patience and gentle curiosity to your experience.

Love After Love

The time will come
when, with elation,
you will greet yourself arriving
at your own door, in your own mirror,
and each will smile at the other's welcome
and say, sit here. Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was your self.
Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you
all your life, whom you have ignored
for another, who knows you by heart.
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,
the photographs, the desperate notes,
peel your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life.

Derek Walcott, Collected Poems 1948-1984, New York, Farrar Straus Giroux, 1986.

An Evolving Negativity Bias

The nervous system has been evolving for 600 million years, from ancient jellyfish to modern humans. Our ancestors had to make a critical decision many times a day: approach a reward or avoid a hazard · pursue a carrot or duck a stick.

Your body generally reacts more intensely to negative stimuli than to equally strong positive ones. For example, intense pain can be produced all over the body, but intense pleasure comes only (for most people) from stimulating a few specific regions.

In your brain, there are separate systems for negative and positive stimuli. At a larger scale, the left hemisphere is somewhat specialized for positive experiences while the right hemisphere is more focused on negative ones. Negative stimuli produce more neural activity than do equally intense (e.g., loud, bright) positive ones. They are also perceived more easily and quickly. For example, people in studies can identify angry faces faster than happy ones; even if they are shown these images so quickly that they cannot have any conscious recognition of them, the ancient fight-or-flight limbic system of the brain will still get activated by the angry faces.

The alarm bell of your brain · the amygdala · uses about two-thirds of its neurons to look for bad news: it's primed to go negative. Once it sounds the alarm, negative events and experiences get quickly stored in memory · in contrast to positive events and experiences, which usually need to be held in awareness for a dozen or more seconds to transfer from short-term memory buffers to long-term storage.

Researchers have found that animals, including humans, generally learn faster from pain (alas) than pleasure.

That learning from your childhood and adulthood · both what you experienced yourself and saw others experiencing around you · is locked and loaded in your head today, ready for immediate activation, whether by a frown across a dinner table or by TV images of a car-bombing 10,000 miles away.

What to Do?

To keep our ancestors alive, Mother Nature evolved a brain that routinely tricked them into making three mistakes: overestimating threats, underestimating opportunities, and underestimating resources. This is a great way to pass on gene copies, but a lousy way to promote quality of life.

So for starters, be mindful of the degree to which your brain is wired to make you afraid, wired so that you walk around with an ongoing trickle of anxiety (a flood for some) to keep you on alert. And wired to zero in on any apparent bad news in a larger stream of information (e.g., fixing on a casual aside from a family member or co-worker), to tune out or de-emphasize reassuring good news, and to keep thinking about the one thing that was negative in a day in which a hundred small things happened, ninety-nine of which were neutral or positive. (And, to be sure, also be mindful of any tendency you might have toward rose-colored glasses or putting that ostrich head in the sand.)

Then you won't be so vulnerable to intimidation by apparent tigers+ that are in fact manageable, blown out of proportion, or made of paper-maché.

Adapted from Rick Hanson, Ph.D.