

Mindfulness

Dr Seb Pillon

What is mindfulness?

- ▶ Mindfulness is a type of meditation that essentially involves focusing your mind on the present.
- ▶ It frees you from constantly regretting past actions or worrying about the future.
- ▶ A body of research has shown that regularly practising the simple techniques can promote a sense of calm and well-being.
- ▶ You can observe positive changes in the brain after a period of mindfulness practice.
- ▶ These changes result in more positive thinking, improved mood, less anxiety and stress and better relationships or a sense of connectedness.
- ▶ Studies on the brains of people who practice mindfulness show a greater ability to cope with emotional upset and increased resilience.

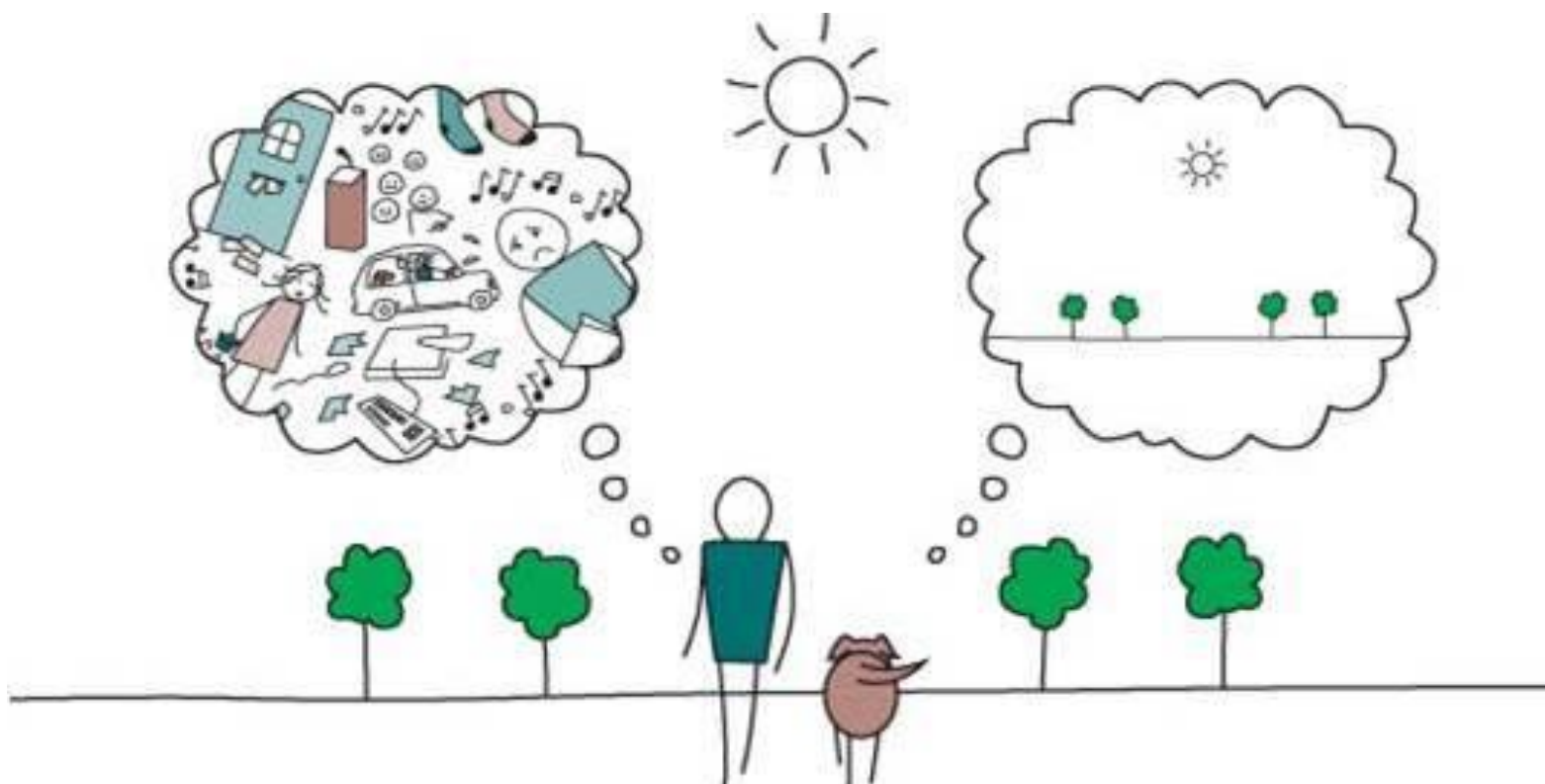


Mindfulness for Patients



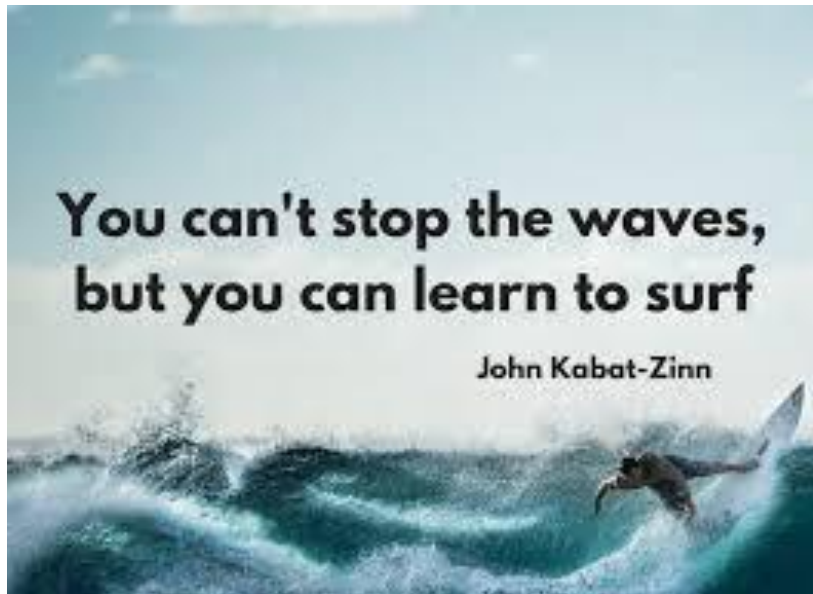
What is mindfulness?

- ▶ Mindfulness does not conflict with any beliefs or traditions, whether religious, cultural or scientific.
- ▶ The actual skills might be simple, but because it is so different to how our minds normally behave, it takes a lot of practice.
- ▶ Our minds wander about 50% of the time, but every time we practise being mindful, we are exercising our attention "muscle" and becoming mentally fitter.
- ▶ We can take more control over our focus of attention, and choose what we focus on...rather than passively allowing our attention to be dominated by that which distresses us and takes us away from the present moment.
- ▶ Mindfulness might simply be described as choosing and learning to control our focus of attention.



Mind Full, or Mindful?

- ▶ As we become more practised at using mindfulness for breathing, body sensations and routine daily activities, so we can then learn to be mindful of our thoughts and feelings, to become observers, and then **more accepting of them**.
 - ▶ This results in less distressing feelings, and increases our ability to enjoy our lives.
- ▶ When we are more practiced in using mindfulness, we can use it even in times of intense distress, by becoming mindful of the actual experience **as an observer**
 - ▶ By focussing our attention on mindful breathing, listening to the distressing thoughts and **recognising them as merely thoughts**, we can breathe with them, allowing them to happen without believing them or arguing with them.
 - ▶ If thoughts are too strong or loud, then we can move our attention to our breath, the body, or to sounds around us



Think of your mind as the surface of a lake or an ocean.

There are always waves on the water, sometimes big, sometimes small, sometimes almost imperceptible.

The water's waves are churned up by winds, which come and go and vary in direction and intensity, just as do the winds of stress and change in our lives.

It's possible to find shelter from much of the wind that agitates the mind, for a time.

But whatever we might do to prevent them, the winds will still blow.

Advice for patients

- ▶ Mindfulness can be practised anywhere, costs nothing, and you can dedicate as much or as little time to it as you like.
- ▶ Using an app such as *Headspace* or *Calm* can help
- ▶ **Find what suits you:** You might find that yoga or walking helps you, or you might want to try an app to get started with mindfulness. Try different things to find what suits you.
- ▶ **Take your time:** Mindfulness is a skill that will take some learning and practise, especially if it feels like worlds away from your current constant rush of thoughts. So build it up slowly, be kind to yourself and don't expect yourself to get it right straight away.
- ▶ **Timetable it in:** If you can, try and dedicate a few minutes a day to practising mindfulness at a time that's convenient. If you do it at the same time each day, it can become part of your routine making it easier to do it regularly.



Mindfulness for Doctors

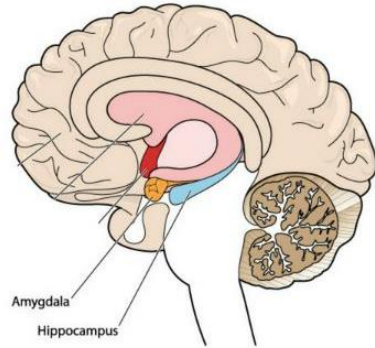
Why do doctors resist?

- ▶ Machismo
 - ▶ Classically male and masculine dominated profession
- ▶ Professionalism
 - ▶ “It’s part of the job”
- ▶ Risk of letting guard down/opening the floodgates
 - ▶ If we let ourselves feel, we won’t be able to stop
- ▶ Time constraints

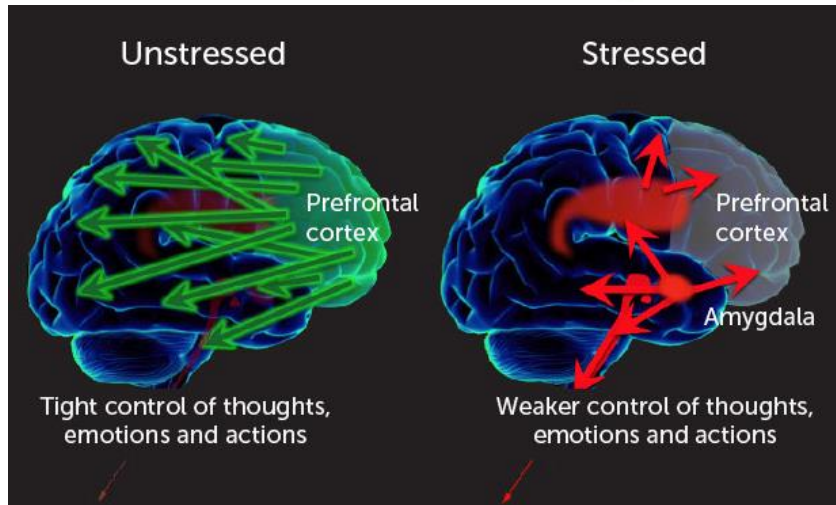
The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.

- Naomi Rachel Remen

AMYGDALA + HIPPOCAMPUS



- The amygdala controls emotional responses & helps your brain store memories
- It works closely with the hippocampus
- The hippocampus plays a role in memory, navigation, & emotional response



Stress & the brain

- ▶ Stress blocks clear thinking
- ▶ The hyperactive amygdala (the emotional thermostat) blocks 'slow' or reflective thinking by inhibiting activity of the hippocampus.
- ▶ The hippocampus plays a role in the formation of new memory about experienced events.
- ▶ Long term traumatic stress leads to atrophy of hippocampus more than any other part of the brain

How does mindfulness benefit?

- ▶ Studies into mindfulness have demonstrated the following benefits:
 - ▶ Improved working memory
 - ▶ Sustained attention
 - ▶ Emotional self-regulation
 - ▶ Promotes social behaviour
 - ▶ Potentially minimises age-related cognitive decline
 - ▶ (may also have an effect on pro-inflammatory genes)

Mindfulness in Medicine

Being fully present to the patient

Improved cognition

Empathetic understanding

Compassion

Fosters healing as well as curing

Greater resilience

Improved patient outcomes

- ▶ **The effect of mindfulness training prior to total joint arthroplasty on post-operative pain and physical function: A randomised controlled trial**
 - ▶ Complementary Therapies in Medicine; Volume 46, October 2019, p195-201
- ▶ Total joint arthroplasty is the only definitive surgical intervention for treating advanced hip or knee osteoarthritis.
- ▶ Pre-surgery psychological distress is an important predictor of sub-optimal outcomes following TJA.
- ▶ **Pre-surgery MBSR improves pain and function in people with psychological distress undergoing total joint arthroplasty.**
- ▶ A potential causal mechanism to explain these findings is yet to be identified.

If the
Orthopods are
doing it...

Six Mindful Techniques to Try

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/317986>
#Mindfulness-on-the-go

Quick Mindful Activities

▶ **Pause and breathe**

- ▶ Pause, breathe, and notice, for example, your hand on the door handle, just before you go through.

▶ **Find your feet**

- ▶ When seated or standing, become aware of where your feet are, their position on the floor, the balance of weight between the two feet, and any sensations in them. This technique is also used in public speaking training.

▶ **Make ordinary tasks extraordinary**

- ▶ Make tasks less of a routine by experiencing them as if for the first time, and with the inquisitive nature of a child.
- ▶ Try and eat lunch using your non-dominant hand.
- ▶ The same can be done when, for instance, walking in nature - take in the surroundings, sound, vision, and feel. Take yourself off “autopilot” when on a usual route or routine.

More Meditative Activities

▶ **Mindful meditation**

- ▶ Be aware of the touch of your breath and the different sensations as you breathe. Exercise compassion by not being hard on yourself when the mind wanders, and gently return your attention to the breath.
- ▶ You can do this for as little as 1 minute while sitting on a chair, all the while being aware of the spine, as well as the feet on the floor.

▶ **Body scan**

- ▶ Lying down, bring awareness to different parts of the body, notice the body's position in space, and take note of any sensations - both pleasant and unpleasant - while acting as a non-judgmental witness to the experience.

▶ **Awareness of feelings and thoughts**

- ▶ Watch your thoughts come and go. You can also name individual thoughts - for example, "this is anger."
- ▶ Try viewing your own thoughts as clouds moving across a sky - with some dark and some light, some big and some small. Note the "emotional charge" that the thoughts bring, and let them be.

HAVE A MINDFUL MONDAY!

See and feel how paying attention to the sensations of everyday experiences can calm your mind every Monday and throughout the rest of the week.



SHOWERING

Get lost in the sound and steam. Let the pitter-patter of the water soothe your mind.

GETTING DRESSED

Take in the textures and colors of your clothing. Pay attention to how they feel on your skin.

BED MAKING

Notice how the sheets feel against your fingertips as you smooth out the wrinkles.



EATING

Appreciate the aroma of your food, and revel in the flavor and texture of each bite.

LISTENING

Close your eyes and focus on the sounds around you. Pick a specific noise, and follow it.

HAND-WASHING

Be aware of the warm water as it flows over your hands, and let the fragrance of the soap take you away.

Eating a Raisin

Guided meditation

Reflection



How was this experience the same or different from how you normally eat?



What, if anything, surprised you about the experience?



What did you notice with the raisin (or whatever food you chose) in terms of sight, touch, sound, smell, and taste?



What thoughts or memories popped up while doing this exercise?



What is one tip for yourself that you are going to take from this experience to apply to your eating habits in the future?

- ▶ https://www.racp.edu.au/docs/default-source/fellows/resources/congress-2018-presentations/racp-tues-18-tony-dunin.pdf?sfvrsn=5d700b1a_2
- ▶ <http://franticworld.com/beyond-chocolate/>

Sources