

# Mindfulness

## *Transforming Your Clients & Yourself*

*By Elaine M. Schachelmayer*



In today's go-go-go, 24/7, constantly-checking-our smart-phones society, it seems we're rarely alone with our thoughts. While mindfulness is not "new" – it has Buddhist origins dating back 2,500 years or more – it is the realization of today's continual "busy-ness" that is no doubt helping

fuel the growing mindfulness movement. What is mindfulness? As opposed to our minds being too FULL of activity, worries, and concerns, mindfulness is the state of being conscious, aware of, or "mindFUL" of one's surroundings. Additional definitions of mindfulness include:

- The practice of maintaining a nonjudgmental state of heightened or complete awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, and feelings;
- The process of calmly accepting, acknowledging the present moment and the feelings, thoughts, and bodily perceptions and sensations that exist; and
- *Mindfulness* is the gentle effort to be continuously present, according to scientist, writer, and mindfulness guru Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD.

The purpose of mindfulness is an awareness of being "in the moment" and the directions we give our mind to stay fully present in our experiences.

### **What Meditation & Mindfulness is NOT**

The concepts of "meditation" and "mindfulness" are confusing to some people, so here is some clarification. Meditation and mindfulness is *not*:

- Going into a trance or self-hypnosis;
- Attempting to empty your mind;

- Just for spiritual leaders, monks, priests, nuns;
- A technique for relaxation;
- Another form of positive thinking; and
- A reason not to work with mental health or medical professionals (mindfulness can complement traditional Western medicine).

### **Why Mindfulness is Needed**

- Fear and anxiety are worthy of our attention.
- Upsetting feelings are not a punishment or a sign of weakness.
- Opening a door to the unknown makes possible a corridor to curiosity.
- We can pay attention to unpleasant sensations and thoughts and still be okay.
- Changing mental states through attentive mind-body experiences can transform destructive reactions into peaceful insight and acceptance.

### **Anxiety is Rampant in Today's 24/7 Society**

Chronic anxiety is especially troublesome. It can be identified as:

- A higher intensity that has become alarming;
- There is no real reason or evidence why anxiety should be present;
- It lasts for weeks, and even months at a time ... well beyond typical bouts of anxiety;
- Detrimental signs result in painful and damaging living; and
- Frequently masked by withdrawal, alcohol or other drugs, abuse of food, lost work performance, and somatic symptoms.

### **What Mindfulness can do**

In today's busy society, we need to be able to find our bearings, to step back. Mindfulness is a great gift for our own lives and in the workplace. Mindfulness offers a viable tool for EAP practitioners in the treatment of fear, anxiety, addiction,

stress, trauma, panic, and other conditions that limit individuals in their function and relationships with themselves and with others.

*As professionals in mental wellness, mindfulness provides an encouraging opportunity for self-care.* Mindfulness also offers:

- A gateway to transformational living with endless compassion and unconditional acceptance of self;
- A conduit to health and healing; and
- An opportunity for kindness and openheartedness; friendly, “allowing,” non-judging.

### **Mindfulness is an Important Ally ...**

❖ ... Balancing distortions, moving from hyperarousal and chronic stress to calm and relaxed attention – an opportunity to “let go”;

❖ ... Reducing fight-or-flight responses, activated stress hormones, immune deficiencies, worsening depression, memory impairment, and possible breakdown of disease-fighting repair;

❖ ... Checking chronic stress that becomes a debilitating barrier frequently associated with depression, panic and anxiety disorders, and mood regulation;

❖ ... Lessening the dependence on alcohol and drugs that interfere with life (the need for self-medication); and

❖ ... Restoring balance, needed especially for combat veterans and others suffering from PTSD, traumatic grief, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and individuals with social anxiety.

### **Mindfulness Offers the Potential for Healing**

❖ Research cannot explain fully how the practice of mindfulness works, but evidence from *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* shows a marked decline in the amygdala stress response.

❖ Mindfulness can help individuals better cope with anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), aggression, social fears, depression, fear-related learning, and many physical, painful, and chronic conditions.

❖ Using mindfulness together with cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT), narrative therapy, psychotherapy, and journaling can help “layer” effective mental health treatment.

❖ Mindfulness can assist the aging elderly population, individuals with brain injury, people who have a history of cognitive disorganization, hospice patients, and professional caregivers coping with compassion fatigue.

### **Mindfulness Enhances Compassion**

Of all the wonderful gifts that mindfulness has to offer, among the greatest is our *heart qualities* such as loving kindness. Cultivating a heart filled with love for others and self is to embrace all of life. We appreciate life even in the pains of suffering through it.

Compassion is seen in our vulnerability as we age and die ... as we find our way in life. We learn to love more softly, with greater tenderness, and at our own pace.

*When we see what mindfulness can do for ourselves, we see what it can do for others.* But it does not happen easily, it has to be practiced daily.

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### **Jon Kabatt-Zinn’s 7 Stepping Stones about Mindfulness**

1. *Non-judging* (Not having preconceived notions about others or our surroundings);
2. *Patience* (This has always been a virtue, but in a “gotta-have-it” now or “have-to-know-it” society, this seems to be especially true today);
3. *Beginner’s Mind* (This is the idea of looking at things for the first time, not unlike a child);
4. *Trust* (Confidence, faith, hope, and assurance ... as opposed to disbelief, doubt, uncertainty and mistrust);
5. *Non-striving* (“This is not supposed to be work,” says Kabatt-Zinn. “If you think it is just one more thing to do, don’t do it. Mindfulness involves *being*, not *doing*.”)

- 6. *Acceptance*; and
- 7. *Letting go*.

## Mind-Body Thinking

- “I am not my thoughts.”
- “I am more than my thoughts.”
- “My thinking does not define me.”
- “Stay in the moment, utilize all five senses.”  
(What do you see? What do you feel?)

## Summary

Stop *striving* and you will start *thriving*. Remember that everything happens in the present moment.

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## How is Nutrition Mindful?

*By Frank Alvarez, Lt. Col. USAF (retired)*



**O**ur stomach acts like a “second brain.” As a result, the “brain-gut connection” is powerful. Bad food is addictive, just like gambling, drugs, or anything else. Be mindful, pay attention.

### Nutritional 9-1-1

- *Don't skip breakfast!*
- *Add one nutrient dense food each day for 30 days.* This is as opposed to trying to change your diet too much at one time. Add one “banana,” then one “apple,” etc. Before you know it you are eating a much healthier diet.
- *Make each meal “right”* – in other words, the proper amount of protein, carbs, (low) fat, etc.
- *Move it or lose it* – the need for daily exercise.

Each of these points are expounded upon in the following sections.

## Don't Skip Breakfast

- You are literally “breaking the fast” you incur from a full night’s sleep.
- Breakfast is the most important meal of the deal, but it’s not the meal, it’s the food you eat. Good breakfast foods include whole-grain cereals, whole fruit, and eggs.

## Add One Whole Food Each Day

- Each day add a whole food to your diet and/or meal.
- Don't replace, add to it.
- It is not cumulative.
- What will begin to happen is that you will find you like, and your body needs, these foods.
- You will crowd out the bad stuff (non-nutrient dense).

## Make Each Meal “Right”

- Protein, carbohydrates, fats at each meal.
- Essential or not?
- The good, the bad, the ugly.

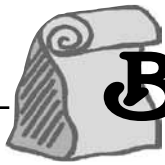
## Movement

- Move it or lose it!
- Bad conditioning can even lead to loss of memory, depression, and discontent.

## Summary

Socrates had this to say about mindfulness: “You should learn all you can from those who know. Everyone should watch himself throughout his life, and notice what sort of meat and drink and what form of exercise suit his constitution, and he should regulate them in order to enjoy good health. For by such attention to yourselves you can discover better than any doctor what suits your constitution.” ■

*Health Coach Frank Alvarez, Lt. Col. United States Air Force (retired), has spent his life developing a way of life that is optimized, realistic, and enjoyable. In his travels over 25 years as an Air Force pilot, he saw firsthand how other cultures “do it right”. With this and his education in holistic nutrition, he has forged a style that works in this technology wonderland of the 21st century. It wasn't without error though. For his story, blog, videos, and more, visit [www.franklynutritious.com](http://www.franklynutritious.com).*



# Brown Bagger HANDOUT

## Tips on Living Mindfully

### Take Some “Advice” from Your Pet!

Take time to watch how mindful your pet cat or dog lives. They know how to find time to take a nap on your favorite furniture or near a sunny window or place in a room. Other tips:

- Allow yourself to purr (or leisurely pant).
- Appreciate your own rhythm.
- Enjoy nature. Watch the birds and stalk in tall grass – or play a fun game of fetch.
- Pamper yourself with leisurely grooming.
- Like pets, take time to cuddle.
- Find a cozy sweater or afghan to wrap yourself in.

### Turn Off Your Cell Phone! Rest in Silence!

Complete the following questionnaire:

- I have checked my phone \_\_\_\_\_ times since waking up.
- I have checked my email today \_\_\_\_\_ times.
- When I woke up this morning I was already thinking about \_\_\_\_\_.
- On average I interact with social media about \_\_\_\_\_ daily.

### Putting into Practice

❖ Before reading this *Brown Bagger*, I would utilize the mindfulness skills outlined (check one):

- Not at all
- A little
- On a fairly regular basis
- Daily

❖ After reading this *Brown Bagger*, I will commit to using and practicing mindfulness (check all that apply):

- In my own self-care
- In my relationships
- At work
- With clients
- Whenever I feel a greater need to be attentive in my being

❖ I would say that I am open to learning more about mindfulness. (Yes or no)

❖ I will allow myself to live in silence and apply mindfulness (check one):

- Less than five minutes per day
- Less than twenty minutes per day
- Less than forty-five minutes per day
- As much as necessary ■

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