

Meditation and Mindfulness

The benefits of mindfulness and meditation seem to be all over the news, on television, in movies and on social media. While it sounds intriguing, for many people the terms conjure images of robed yogis floating in the clouds. In fact, the benefits of regular practice can help you get and stay grounded. People who meditate report reductions in stress and improvements in concentration, sleep and mood ? all of which contribute to academic success!



Renowned meditation teacher and author Jon Kabat-Zinn says mindfulness means ?paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally?. For some this comes naturally. For most it is a skill that can be practiced and learned. Fortunately, there are many ways to incorporate meditation and mindfulness into your day that won?t overload your schedule. CAPS mindfulness and meditation programs aim to make the benefits of mindfulness accessible to every student. You can try some of the skills by visiting the pages below. Or join us for one (or more) of the many four-week groups offered each semester.

UNC students report that Meditation and Mindfulness have helped them:

- ***Slow down.***
- ***Appreciate more.***
-

Observe my feelings.

- ***Feel more positive and energized.***
- ***Be more centered and focused.***
- ***Manage stress and anxiety.***

There are various methods of meditation, formal and informal, as determined by the focal point that attention is trained to.

Mindfulness describes both a form of meditation and a way of being in the world. For example, you might sit for a period of time following your breathing, noticing thoughts and other experiences entering into your consciousness, but always returning your attention to your breath. You might be walking across campus and instead of thinking about the exam coming up in a couple of days decide instead to focus your attention solely on the sights and sounds and sensations around you.

This site offers a sample of meditation and mindfulness practices in the links on the right sidebar. Take a moment to slow down, stop, and smell the flowers.



Despite what you may have heard, meditation does not involve joining a group, paying any fees, wearing any special outfits, sitting in a funny position or believing in anything in particular.

It is simple, secular scientifically validated exercise for your brain. You don't have to do it yet, but just so you know here are the three steps:

1. Sit with your back straight and your eyes closed.
2. Notice the feeling of your breath coming in and going out. Pick a spot where it's most prominent - usually that's your nose or your chest or your belly and just focus your full attention on the feeling of your breath coming in and going out.

Now, as soon as you try to do this your mind is going to go nuts. You're going to start thinking about, "What am I going to have for lunch?" "Why did I say that dumb thing to my boss?" Your brain is going to go nuts and that's fine. The whole game is to notice when you've gotten lost and to start over. And then to start over again and again and again. Every time you do that it's like a bicep curl for your brain and it shows up on the brain scan. Scientists have found this in the lab.

It's also, by the way, a radical act. You're breaking a lifetime's habit of walking around in a fog of projection and rumination and you're actually focusing on what's happening right now.

Meditation is unlike anything you do in the rest of your life. Failure is actually success!

As I said the whole game is just trying, failing, starting again, failing, starting again.

Here's my advice. You should be meditating every day - 5 to 10 minutes a day. That's it. This doesn't require some giant investment. I don't care how busy you are you have 5 to 10 minutes to give this a shot.

I guarantee you it will make a big difference.

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