

COMMENTARY

Mindfulness: Why All the Hype?

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Mindfulness is not a new concept. Its modern conception dates back decades, and its premise has been around for centuries. Briefly explained, mindfulness means being present in the current moment without judgment. The concept is simple, but the practice can take a lifetime to master—if ever.

Still, what's old is new again. The cover story for the February 3, 2014, *Time* magazine is, "The Art of Being Mindful."¹ In 2014 alone, there have been 139 PubMed citations regarding mindfulness. Why? It seems to be working.

Mindfulness has been studied in nearly every population you can imagine. Most notably, its effects have been assessed in soldiers; students; physicians; nurses; and patients living with cancer, stress, and mood disorders. For anyone with a history of trauma, it seems to work. For those of us distracted by our work, family, home, and social responsibilities or notifications constantly "binging" onto our mobile devices and medical records, mindfulness can provide solace in the middle of the storm. Mindfulness can be applied to eating, walking, praying, meditating, and, according

to *Time* magazine, even managing our spending.

Physicians and health care providers have known the benefits of meditation for years. Studies have proven it to be helpful in stress, insomnia, anxiety, depression, pain, obesity, and other conditions.² Somehow, only a minority of patients—and ourselves for that matter—are successful with traditional meditation as a longitudinal practice. If we know it will make us healthier, why can't we do it?

According to Amit Sood, MD, professor of medicine at the Mayo Clinic and author of *The Mayo Clinic Guide to Stress-Free Living*, the brain is a very busy place. Within its "default mode," the brain has countless connections of neurons and hundreds of neural networks that are firing frequently and constantly. This background brain chatter makes quieting the mind difficult for those untrained and inexperienced. The associated frustration leads to the abandonment of meditation practice.

Instead, Dr. Sood's program—and mindfulness in general—places the focus outward with intention. By focusing on your surroundings,

you enhance your experience of the world. By setting intentions of gratitude, compassion, acceptance, and forgiveness, you become kinder, gentler, and more joyful. The brain quiets, and you calm. Do you know anyone who would not benefit from that?

Our American lives are stressful, and our happiness tends to be low. This remains true even when external threats are lacking. Most of us are not surviving natural disasters or being chased by predators. Still, our sympathetic nervous systems are on overdrive from responsibilities, deadlines, projects, and dreams. Perhaps we have started to realize that. Perhaps we are tired of being drained of energy from this excessive worry. Perhaps this is why mindfulness has found its time.

References

1. Pickert K. The art of being mindful. *Time* 2014; 183(4):40-8.
2. Goyal, et al. Meditation programs for psychological stress and well-being: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *JAMA Intern Med* 2014; 174(3):357-68.