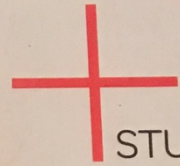


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MATTERS OF
MINDFULNESS

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PAY ATTENTION!

WHILE THE TERM MINDFULNESS IS BECOMING POPULAR IN USE, ITS CONCEPT IS FAR FROM NEW.

Its roots are entrenched in the histories of such countries as Tibet, India, and China, to name a few. Jon Kabat-Zinn – the founding father of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (a clinical approach to meditation), offers a modern-day definition: “Mindfulness is the awareness which arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally.”

Feel like that may be difficult with a busy mind? You're not alone. On average, we each think a staggering 50,000 to

MATTERS OF MINDFULNESS

BY CASSIDY THEDORF

70,000 thoughts per day – in fact, the mind is often referred to as the monkey mind. Our attention jumps around from thought to thought the same way a mad monkey would jump from tree to tree. It may seem that this can't be changed; we often hear people say, “I have a busy mind,” “My mind is racing,” or “I'm always multi-tasking.”

The good news is that with practise, you too can begin to tame the monkey mind, becoming more aware of mind activity: thoughts, judgments, preferences, worries, projections, perspectives and more.

There are a number of ways to notice what's happening in the present moment, without getting caught up in the mind's narrative. The quickest way to be mindful is to tune in to the senses, noticing sensations and their textures. This practise includes becoming aware of emotions, and truly feeling them in the body.

As we begin to notice our thinking, a realization dawns that we don't always have to associate with thoughts—in other words, not every thought you think is true. This disassociation can empower you to question thought patterns, determining which ones truly serve you. You may liken this noticing of mind activity to watching the weather—it's always changing, and so it's best to watch it without attachment, without judgment. This witness stance, or observation mode, brings with it a host of benefits.

Meditation, in particular, is shown to have profound impacts on health from a physical, emotional and mental perspective. Meditation, and the mindfulness it cultivates, help with stress reduction, inflammation, blood pressure, depression, memory, focus, self-awareness, and more.

Research tells us that having a mindful approach to fitness has a specific myriad of benefits, including reducing injury, improvement of workout quality, increases in both satisfaction and enjoyment, among others. It's for these reasons that mindfulness is making its way into schools, gyms, fitness centres, professional sports teams and beyond.

To incorporate mindfulness into your fitness, first begin by tuning into your breath when you are ready to workout. Notice, are you breathing deeply? Is your breath perhaps more shallow? Notice without judgment, as you tune into what it feels like to arrive. If you notice that your breath is coming from your chest, rather than your diaphragm, practise a few nourishing, deep-belly breaths to activate the parasympathetic nervous system, starting your workout from a place of relaxation and repair. Take a moment to set an intention for your workout. How do you want to feel? Can you allow yourself to be present for your workout?

Throughout your session, check in to the sensations within your body, taking a curious approach. Know where you can push yourself, and where to invite ease. Notice your form, if you keep your core tight. Notice any changes in the breath. Pay attention to mind activity – noticing thought patterns.

Mindfulness brings with it the chance to be kinder to ourselves, to make a choice in perspective. Whether at the gym or in everyday life, we all deserve a little more self-love, a little less monkey-mind, and a lot more mindfulness. It begins with one deep, conscious breath. **SE**

How to Meditate

MEDITATION CAN HELP YOU TO BECOME MORE MINDFUL IN EVERYDAY LIFE.

To start a meditation practise, take a few simple steps. First, choose a time of day when you can consistently take 2-5 minutes to yourself. That may be first thing in the morning, before you go to bed, or during a break at work. Let people know that you are taking some time to yourself, so that you will be undisturbed. Ideally, meditate in the same place each day, as you will more easily come into a meditative state with practise. You don't need anything more than a comfortable seat or a place to lie down. To begin, set a timer on your phone before placing it on silent. Get comfortable, closing your eyes if you like, and start to notice your breath. You may wish to start with a few nice deep inhales and exhales, using the breath to invite the body to relax. With practise, the mind will follow. Perhaps even let out an audible sigh. As you begin to settle into your natural rhythm of breath, notice if it fills your chest, belly, or diaphragm. Notice its ease, its pattern, and depth. You may even say to yourself, "breathing in, I am aware that I am breathing in. Breathing out, I am aware that I am breathing out," or simply "breathing in, breathing out." When the mind wanders, as it inevitably will, notice where it went to before gently guiding your awareness back (with kindness and compassion) to your breath. Forget about trying to clear the mind, forget about trying to achieve anything. Just come back to the breath over and over again, knowing that each inhale represents a fresh start – a chance to begin again. Over time, the benefits of meditation will naturally appear, so no need to strive. Allow yourself to simply breathe, in this moment, to simply be.

Try These!