**Employee Health Hurdles**

**Mindfulness January 2021**

**Overview:**

Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention and staying present in the moment: It is being aware of where you are and what you are doing, without excessively reacting or being overwhelmed by what is going on around you.

Being mindful has numerous benefits to an individual from decreasing stress and anxiety levels, to positively impacting your brain and immune function. These are just a few of the benefits of being mindful. More categories and descriptions are below.

**Benefits of being mindful are linked to:**

* Feeling less stressed; therefore, less stress hormone circulating in your body. This increases relaxation and improves overall quality of life.
* Emotional regulation- meditation elicits positive emotions and minimizes negative affect, which helps you to efficiently control your emotions.
* The ability to experience compassion and empathy toward others, which strengthens your interpersonal relationships (non-judgemental attitudes can be cultivated, as you practice being non-judgemental of yourself).
* A significant reduction in negative psychological symptoms associated with depression and anxiety.
* Improved memory and focus.
* Slowing the aging process.
* Positively impacting your immune function.
* Overcoming insomnia.
* Increased resilience.
* Stronger relationships.

**How do I know if I am practising being mindful? Take the Quiz.**

<https://www.londonmindful.com/mindfulness-quiz/>

**How to be Mindful in Life:**

* We are constantly being bombarded with information 24/7, with no disconnect, which creates anxiety. Slow down and pay attention to routine tasks.
* You have to cultivate mindfulness and train your brain, whether you are at work, walking, or eating.
* The simplest technique is meditation.
* This can reduce stress, cultivate focus, develop tranquility, and manage frustrations which can help you avoid pitfalls and dissatisfaction on the job.
* An easy way to focus on work is to turn off your pop-up notifications, dedicate a timeframe to your emails, and finish one task before starting another.
* In meetings, practice no interruptions by turning your phones off and avoiding multi-tasking.
* Short moments of pausing throughout the day effects your disposition. When you are waiting for the elevator, pause and check in with yourself, re-focus your body and mind to the present, take a breath, feel it, and then proceed.
* Leave work at work. Do not check email all the time and decrease your screen time when you arrive home. Be in the moment with friends and family, which will leave you more refreshed when you arrive at the office. Reconnect with nature.

**Mindful Eating:**

* Mindful eating is not a diet. It is a framework to help guide mindful food choices.
* The bottom line is mindful eating is a powerful method to regain control of your eating.
* Mindful eating transforms your relationship with food by focusing on how and why you are eating.
* You have to be aware of which food nourishes and which food helps you stay healthy.
* Culture has caused increased stress around food and eating (such as portions, false expectations, food rewards, punishment for not finishing the food on your plate, diets are easy as 1,2,3).
* Mindful eating consists of not being focused on your weight and portion size, and then people tend to discover their natural weight, unique to them. Eat according to your natural body weight, not society’s expectation of your weight. It is not about changing the food you eat but changing your thinking around food.
* In 2013, a study found that individuals that practised mindful eating naturally decreased their portion sizes.
* Our food choices are based on thoughts and feelings and can be influenced by genetics, metabolism, and individual priorities, unique to each individual.
* Mindfulness means being present along with curiousity and interest with a willingness to explore how and why we think the way we do.

**Science-Backed Tips to Stop Mindless Eating by:**

1. Use visual reminders- leave the chicken bones in view, when you have bottomless wings as a reminder of how much you have eaten.
2. Favour smaller packages, as portion sizes cause you to pause and think about opening another snack.
3. Use smaller plates and taller glasses- big plates tend to make portion sizes look smaller (those that used a 9” plate over a 12.5” plate ate 27% less food and those that used taller glasses drank 57% less fluids).
4. Decrease the variety of food that you eat (unless it is vegetables) because the more variety you have, your body tends to want to eat 23% more (called sensory-specific satiety).
5. Keep some foods out of sight to reduce mindless eating and keep healthy foods visible.
6. Increase the inconvenience of eating by placing junk food where you need to work for it (across the room, high in a cupboard). By having to walk to get the junk food, it now becomes a conscious choice as opposed to mindless eating. On the flip side, make healthy food convenient.
7. Eat slowly, which makes you feel fuller and eat less. You can do this by using chopsticks or eat with your non-dominant hand and chewing slower.
8. Choose your dining companions wisely. Sit beside someone that eats slower and eats less.
9. Eat according to your inner clock, not by time.
10. Beware of health foods such as low fat or low calorie, as you have a tendency of eating more. Focus on the ingredients list, not the health claims.
11. Do not stockpile, as you tend to eat more. Buy enough for a week at a time.
12. Maximize your food volume by picking high fibre foods with less calorie density (such as vegetables). Fill ½ your plate with vegetables.
13. Unplug while you eat. Studies have proven that watching TV and eating, increases your consumption of pizza by 36% and your consumption of macaroni and cheese by 71%.

**Practise Mindful Eating by:**

1. Starting with shopping list- consider the health value of each item and avoid the middle aisles where the processed foods generally are.
2. Come to the table with an appetite- do not skip meals, as then you are ravenous and eat fast.
3. Start your meal with a small portion with a plate size 9” or less.
4. Appreciate your food- pause and think about the company and the process of preparation.
5. Bring all your senses- be attentive, chew your food, and identify the various ingredients.
6. Take small bites and put down your utensil between bites.
7. Chew thoroughly until you taste the essence of the food- 20 to 40 chews.
8. Eat slowly- devote the first 5 minutes to silence and practice mindful eating before chatting.

**Mindful Leadership:**

* In the face of ongoing change, employers hire leaders who can be curious, empathetic, and compassionate. It is about the leader’s ability to influence for the better.
* Mindful leaders embody focus, creativity, clarity, and compassion and treat people with respect and dignity.
* You can exhibit mindful leadership by bringing self-awareness, emotional regulation, and empathy to your interactions with colleagues.

**Back to work Checklist for Mindful Leaders:**

<https://wsmh-cms.mediresource.com/wsmh/assets/9nfbjmywu2w44008>

**Mindful Listening:**

* The goal of mindful listening is to quiet the internal noise of your mind and thoughts so you can hear the entire message. If you are distracted by thoughts and worry about what to say, then you miss the message and are not practising mindful listening.
* Barriers to mindful listening are interrupting, thinking ahead, judging, distractions, autopilot, past experiences, denial, assumptions and jealously just to name a few.
* Mindful listening can help you retain the information, pause before you speak to consider your words and affect, help you pay attention longer and boost your self-esteem.

**How to Practice Mindful Listening:**

1. Be present and focus on the speaker (simplify your surrounding by removing distractions, give yourself time by clearing your mind before the meeting, empty your mind of clutter by doing a quick meditation).
2. Cultivate empathy by understanding the other person’s point of view.
3. Listen to your own cues such as thoughts, feelings, reactions, and anger, which can block ideas. Pay attention and focus on the other person’s words.

**Easy Ways to Be Mindful Every Day:**

* Practise mindfulness during routine activities such as brushing your teeth, showering, or eating.
* Practise being mindful as soon as you wake, as it sets the tone for your nervous system.
* Let your mind wander, as a busy brain wants to wander, but notice the wandering and gently bring it back to the present.
* Keep your mindfulness in shorter bursts, which have a better brain response than longer sessions.
* Practice being mindful when you wait because impatience causes irritation.
* Pick a prompt to remind you to be mindful (coffee time, a certain hallway).
* Learn to meditate, as the best way to be mindful is by formal training.
* Schedule time to yourself and put your phone on airplane mode.

What you are

looking for is

NOT

out there.

It is in YOU.

**Mindful Breathing Exercise:**

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/articles/mindfulness-mindful-breathing/>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCu_mPlZbomAgNzfAUElRL7w>

**Mindful Movement:**

<http://befitforlife.ca/resources/mindfulwalking>

<https://d10k7k7mywg42z.cloudfront.net/assets/5e9f524d76ed7f05900007cd/Mindful_Walking__Final_.pdf>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCu_mPlZbomAgNzfAUElRL7w>

**Depression and Mindfulness:**

<https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2018/04/harvard-researchers-study-how-mindfulness-may-change-the-brain-in-depressed-patients/>

**Blood Pressure and Mindfulness:**

<https://www.wbur.org/commonhealth/2018/04/06/harvard-study-relax-genes>

**Resources for Mindfulness:**

<https://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/community-resource-sheets/mindfulness-resources-pdf.pdf?la=en&hash=45DAB3C25F20F91FECF84DC3C08B63F125E00577>

<https://www.mindfulemployer.ca/resources>

<https://www.mindfulnessstudies.com/?fbclid=IwAR0OSA3BrPValW8-xrf1JtSiDKyhsxQS6zR9CHmuaOCdWixTz_Xsj17-sOQ>

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