Workers' Comp

Mindfulness: What Is It?

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3 MIN READ

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness can help you quiet your mind, relax your body, and reduce stress. Mindfulness means taking time to pay attention to the thoughts, feelings, and experiences you're having right now.

For example, you may sit quietly and notice how you are feeling. Or while you're eating, you might slow down to focus on how your food tastes and smells.

Another important part of mindfulness is to accept your thoughts and feelings as they enter your mind. That's because judging may lead you to dwell on (or "get stuck" thinking about) unwanted situations, feelings, or thoughts.

Mindfulness teaches you to be in control of your mind so that your mind doesn't control you. By training your mind to focus only on the present, you're learning how to not get lost in regrets or worries about the future. Letting go of such thoughts may help you accept things that you can't control.

Does mindfulness work?

Practicing mindfulness has been linked to positive changes in areas of the brain that affect how you pay attention, how you feel, and how you think. Like any new skill or habit, being mindful can take practice. And if you keep practicing mindfulness and find that it isn't working for you, that's okay. It may not be for everyone. But for some people, mindfulness may:

- Reduce stress and help them relax.
- Help them sleep better and feel less anxious.
- Help people with chronic conditions to cope better with symptoms.

How to focus your mind on the present

- Focus your attention on your entire body, starting with your feet and ending at your head.
- As you do this "body scan," you might note places where you're tense or have pain. You might notice how your belly rises and falls as you breathe.

- Notice the thoughts that run through your mind. For example, you might have a stressful thought about work. Rather than worry about your thought, simply note the thought ("work") and the feeling ("stress"). Then turn your attention back to the present moment.

Practicing mindfulness

You can practice anytime, anywhere, and in any way you choose. Some people call it a time for quiet reflection, prayer, or meditation. Whatever name you use is fine, because this is your experience—no one else's.

You can practice mindfulness in many ways. Here are a few ideas:

- Go outside and take a few deep breaths. What is the air like? Is it warm or cold? Try to accept that feeling and not resist it.
- When you can, take some time at the beginning of your day to sit alone and think.
- Take a slow walk by yourself. Count your steps while you breathe in and out.
- Try yoga breathing exercises, stretches, and poses to strengthen and relax your muscles.
- At work, if you can, try to stop for a few moments each hour. Note how your body feels. Let yourself regroup and let your mind settle before you return to what you were doing.
- If you struggle with anxiety or "worry thoughts," imagine your mind as a blue sky and your worry thoughts as clouds. Now imagine those worry thoughts floating across your mind's sky. Just let them pass by as you watch.

Now that you know what mindfulness is and how it can help, what do you think? If practicing mindfulness is something you'd like to try, what would be a good next step for you? It may be just the thing you never knew you needed.

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