

Everyday Mindfulness

Today is the sixteenth in a series of articles on mindfulness. To review, mindfulness is a form of stress reduction. In the simplest terms, mindfulness is paying attention to the present moment without judgment. It focuses our attention on the only moment in which we are alive, which is right now. Paying attention in this way can reduce stress, depression, anxiety and even potentially bring about healing. Today I will examine how to be mindful in everyday life.

Learning anything new is only useful to the degree in which it has practical application in life. Otherwise why take the time to learn? With regard to learning mindfulness, reading these articles is a good first step. However, if you only read them, rather than practice, then the material is merely academic and not practically useful. My focus today is to shed light on how mindfulness can be practiced throughout your day, and as a result, enrich your life. Mindfulness is not something you do for 20 minutes in the morning and then forget about. We can learn that anything we experience in the course of our day can be done with a degree of mindfulness.

The first daily experience to practice is waking up in the morning. Tomorrow morning, when you wake up, be aware of coming out of sleep. Before you move, breathe in the moment and say, "Here I am, waking up." Notice your body and stretch it out. Slowly sit up and feel your feet touch the floor and be grateful for a new day. Be aware of how most of your life, you never paid attention to waking up. If you do this exercise, chances are you will wake up for the first time.

What we are trying to avoid is the robotic and automatic way we commonly live our life. We take a routine task like brushing our teeth and pay attention to it from moment to moment. We taste the toothpaste; we feel the brush and notice wiping off the water from our face. We try as best as we can to be less mechanical with daily activities.

Another mindful moment is saying, "Good-bye" to our family in the morning. Do you shout good-bye from the doorstep or do you make eye contact? Do you take the time to hug your spouse and children? When you hug them, is it a nervous routine or can you embrace them with care and compassion? These are interesting questions to ask yourself about something as simple as saying, "Good-bye."

Pets offer great opportunities to be mindful. My cat, Lucy, for instance, purrs like a machine. She will let me brush her for as long as I am willing and she will purr the entire time. In these moments, I can pay attention to making her happy and she will reflect her happiness back to me. If you have a dog, walk your dog mindfully. Notice the trees, feel the air and the pull of your beloved dog as you walk him or her. You can have fun and ponder metaphysical questions like, "Are you walking the dog, or is your dog walking you?"

Another exercise is to shower mindfully. The next time you take a shower, notice how your mind wanders while in the shower. I will notice that I will be in the shower, but my mind is already at work. I may be arguing on the phone at work in my imagination, but my body is in the shower. So I ask myself, "Where is my mind right now?" Wouldn't it make more sense to be in the shower while I am in the shower? It makes no sense to be at work ahead of time, and in fact, it is stressful. To reduce my stress, I bring my mind back to the shower and pay attention. I feel the water, smell the soap, and am grateful for running water.

Consider this list of opportunities to be mindful of in your daily life: cooking, driving, eating, ironing, giving children baths, shopping, taking out the garbage, and even cashing a check. All of these and any others you can think of are wonderful ways to be present and aware of your life. Living your life to the fullest, that is the miracle of mindfulness.

Matthew McQuaid, DPM is a board certified foot surgeon practicing in Lakeport. He has a particular interest in Mind/Body medicine and its impact on healing. He is an award winning author and teacher. Please share this article with a friend. For more information please call 707-263-3727 and for a complete list of articles, please visit www.drmcquaid.com