

The Effect of Meditation & Mindfulness on our Healing

Pursuing Podcast Episode 9

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Notes	
Main Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding what meditation and mindfulness are, how they work, and why we should use them is critical for us to create the motivation to implement them in our recovery and healing journey.• Meditation and mindfulness are practices. They will take time and discipline to implement in our lives. Doing so with compassion, patience, and perseverance is critical for a positive outcome.
What is Meditation and Mindfulness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The history of meditation and mindfulness is ancient and spiritual, originating in religion.• Ancient meditation focused on spiritual growth and transcending emotions to live in a calm present state.• In the history of meditation and mindfulness, there was an important recognition of something beyond the mind and emotions—consciousness. This is the part of us that is believed to continue to exist even after brain function ceases and our physical body dies. This consciousness, or spiritual aspect (depending on who is referring to it), is what meditation seeks to bring forward to override the unconscious mind-chatter and emotional waves. This is often represented by what is referred to as our third eye, what neuroscientists call the middle prefrontal cortex.• Dan Siegal explained that the integrative fibers of the discerning middle prefrontal cortex seem to reach out and soothe the more reactive emotional structures of the brain. Meditation helps with these processes.• Bushak said, “Meditation is a large umbrella term that encompasses the practice of reaching ultimate consciousness and concentration, to acknowledge the mind and, in a way, self-regulate it. It can involve a lot of

	<p>techniques or practices to reach this heightened level of consciousness — including compassion, love, patience, and of course, mindfulness. So mindfulness is a type of meditation, alongside yoga, silence, breathing, and emptiness” (2016).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Loving-Kindness Meditation (example): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bring to mind a loved-one and repeat one of the phrases (or an adapted version of the phrases) in your mind three times as you think about this person (attention and intention): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>May you live with ease, may you be happy, may you be free from pain.</i> ■ <i>Just as I wish to, may you be safe, may you be healthy, may you live with ease and happiness.</i> ■ <i>May your life be filled with happiness, health, and well-being.</i> ○ Repeat this process with an acquaintance, and then with all beings everywhere. (Add yourself and eventually someone you have negative feelings towards.) ● Mindfulness is the act of focusing on being in the present, such as focusing completely on what we are eating, taking in the smell, temperature, and taste and removing overpowering emotions from the mind.
<p>How do mindfulness and meditation affect our healing? Why are they important?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “We inherited the reactivity of this part of our brain, and particularly the sensitive amygdala, from our skittish fight-or-flight ancestors. Yet so much of our inner journey means freeing ourselves from this evolutionary response so that we do not flip our lid or lose our higher reasoning when facing stressful situations. The real secret of freedom may simply be extending this brief space between stimulus and response. Meditation seems to elongate this pause and help expand our ability to choose our response” (Abrams, 2016, p. 179). ● Meditation (through mindfulness) is how we build the capacity of our conscious filtering introduced in the expanded TEBB model. ● The power of transformation that can be found in meditation and mindfulness is a result of two main factors: attention and

intention. When we bring our consciousness, hope and purpose to our emotions, thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors, this is when real healing and change happen.

- There are a handful of key areas — including depression, chronic pain, and anxiety — in which well-designed, well-run studies have shown benefits for patients engaging in a mindfulness meditation program, with effects similar to other existing treatments.
- “Individual cognitive behavioral therapy is helpful for many people; antidepressant medications help many people. But it’s also the case that many people don’t benefit from them as well. There’s a great need for alternative approaches” (Powell, 2018).
- In an article published in the Harvard Gazette, “When Science meets Mindfulness”, by Alvin Powell, he talks about Desbordes’ research using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), which not only takes pictures of the brain, as a regular MRI does, but also records brain activity occurring during the scan: “In 2012, she demonstrated that changes in brain activity in subjects who have learned to meditate hold steady even when they’re not meditating. Desbordes took before-and-after scans of subjects who learned to meditate over the course of two months. She scanned them not while they were meditating, but while they were performing everyday tasks. The scans still detected changes in the subjects’ brain activation patterns from the beginning to the end of the study, the first time such a change — in a part of the brain called the amygdala — had been detected (2018).
- So often we abandon new practices before they really take hold, because we struggle with being consistent and feelings of guilt about not doing it consistently come up and feel terrible, so we soon create a story as to why we don’t even need it and abandon it all together. Showing up with compassion and patience is vital to be able to persevere.
- Self-compassion is the critical factor for real behavior change, not guilt or self-punishment.
- Marilyn Beecher Thaxton worked at this practice of meditation as it was critical for her healing, just as it is to ours.
- Outline for Marilyn’s meditation:
 - Relaxation achieved through focused, slow breathing and visualization

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Stating of her bridge belief and focus on positive thoughts ○ Statements of goals and intent of healing all aspects of herself ○ Poetry and words of affirmation ○ Inspiration and connection to divine self ○ Positive affirmations to create more positive thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and behaviors
<p>Three Action Items</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Begin to explore the practice of mindfulness by simply focusing on what you are doing in the present moment. Focus on your breathing, what you are eating, etc. Begin by being fully present a few times during the day. ● Look for meditations that resonate with you and try a short one when you can. Find the time of day, location, etc. that works best for you. Play with it. No judgement. Just bring a willingness and desire to implement this powerful practice into your life. ● When you feel ready, you may want to begin working on your own meditation, incorporating the new positive core beliefs you want to integrate and record your words in your voice.
<p>Sources</p>	<p>Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho, D. L. X., Tutu, D., & Abrams, D. C. (2016). <i>The book of joy: Lasting happiness in a changing world</i>. New York: Avery.</p> <p>Bushak, L. (2016, March 10). <i>Mindfulness vs meditation: The difference between these two pathways to well-being and peace of mind</i>. Retrieved from: https://www.medicaldaily.com/mindfulness-meditation-differences-377346</p> <p>Powell, A. (2018, April 9). <i>When science meets mindfulness</i>. Retrieved from: https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2018/04/harvard-researchers-study-how-mindfulness-may-change-the-brain-in-depressed-patients/</p> <p>Tolle, E. (1999). <i>The power of now</i>. Vancouver, B.C., Canada: Namaste Publishing.</p>