

Overview of the Mindfulness - MBSR Course

MBSR = Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness in everyday life is the ultimate challenge and practice. It is a way of being, of seeing, of tapping into the full range of our humanity – often seen in playful children fully experiencing life in the here and now. Mindfulness is described by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994) “*as paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgementally*” (p.4). The attitudinal foundations of mindfulness practice include – non-judging, patience, beginner’s mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance and letting-go.

Through the practice of mindfulness, individuals can become more aware of their thoughts, feelings and body sensations in the present moment. This observing, non-reactive perspective enables you to consciously respond with clarity and focus, rather than react out of a habitual pattern. It opens up the possibility of working more wisely with difficulties in life and choose what is nourishing to ourselves and others.

What is the MBSR Course?

The Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course was first developed by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn in 1979 at the University of Massachusetts Medical Centre. Since then it has been featured on Bill Moyer’s PBS documentary series (1993) - *Healing and the Mind*, in the *Time* as *Newsweek* publications as well as apart of numerous research studies in medicine, psychology and neuroscience. Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn also wrote the book - *Full Catastrophe Living*, which describes the MBSR Course in detail.

What does the course involve?

The MBSR course is an 8-week, nine session course. Participants attend a 2 hour class once a week for eight weeks as well on intensive session (which is generally between the fifth and sixth sessions). The course involves mindfulness meditation training and practice, yoga and body awareness training, exploration of patterns of thinking, feeling and action, brief lectures and group discussions - including inquiry during group time with individuals, individual feedback and support as well as a commitment from the participant to practice daily using the app and handouts.

Throughout the course you are offered a systematic training in mindfulness - learning how to cultivate an observant, accepting and compassionate stance towards your thoughts, emotional states, body sensations and impulses. Specific information about stress physiology, cognitive behavioural strategies, interpersonal communication and implementing self-care are also given. The core formal mindfulness practices taught include a body scan, sitting meditation with concentrative focus on the breath, mindful Hatha Yoga and sitting meditation that expands the focus of attention to choiceless awareness.

Who is it for?

Mindfulness training is useful for a broad range of people with diverse backgrounds, ages, interests and levels of well-being. People self-refer or sometimes are referred by their doctors or psychologists because of physical and emotional stressors in their lives. Many enrol because, although they are feeling well physically, they say the pace of their lives is "out of control" or they're "just not feeling quite right" and want more ease and peace. Mindfulness training can enhance learning, concentration, creativity, personal resilience and professional effectiveness.

For people with job, relationship and family pressures, it can help with all kinds of day-to-day stress symptoms including headaches, irritability, high-blood pressure, fatigue and sleep disturbances.

It can reduce suffering even for those with serious conditions including mild depression, anxiety and panic disorders, cancer, heart disease, diabetes, respiratory disease and chronic pain.

How does it work?

Over the eight-week course, you learn a number of key skills that allow you to tune into and become aware of your experience in the present moment.

Firstly, you establish a routine of spending some time each day by yourself formally practicing mindfulness meditation. By choosing to engage in this practice you will learn how to cultivate deep states of relaxation and well-being. You will also learn how to bring a moment-to-moment awareness to your experience, and then apply this awareness so you can respond - rather than react in habitual ways - to everyday life situations. This becomes much easier to do when you are regularly practicing the formal meditation each day.

The course provides an opportunity for you to examine and reflect on the patterns of your own mind, feelings and actions, and to gently interrupt patterns of self-criticism and unhelpful actions.

We learn how to accept and embrace the full range of experience that life inevitably brings - pleasurable, joyful and expansive experience as well as painful conditions in their various forms - worry, anxiety, tension, impatience, anger, grief, sadness and even despair. Moving towards these conditions with an inquiring attitude, rather than trying to hold on to them, or to escape or avoid them, can bring some surprising and refreshing results.

WEEK	OUTLINE
1	Recognising the Present Moment: * interrupt your "automatic pilot", * slow down and pay attention to your immediate experience, * use body sensations as an anchor in the present moment, * Move from 'doing' mode in to 'being' mode, and * notice the flow of thoughts, feelings and sensations that arise in the present moment.
2	Perception and How We Make Sense of the World: * use the breath as a way to anchor yourself in the present, * use the breath as a way of recognising emotional states, * cultivate a sitting practice using the breath, * use hearing/listening to centre yourself and anchor yourself in the present, * honour and accept all of your experiences - not just the 'good' bits, and * cultivate curiosity about your experiences, not matter what they are.
3	Mindfulness and the Body Connection: * practice patience and acceptance of yourself, * explore moving practice, * learn about the stress reactivity cycle and stress physiology, and * use movement practice to explore limits, and cultivate strength and flexibility of mind and body.
4	Investigating Stressful Experiences: * learn more about stress reactivity and emotions, * explore emotions in a creative and accepting way, * use metaphors to work effectively with strong emotions, * use the bodily sensations of emotions as a way to ground in to the present moment, * recognise and interrupt the thoughts which are associated with painful emotions, and * use the breath as a way of coping with intense emotions.
5	Working with Emotions and Thoughts: * remember that thoughts are not facts (even the ones that say they are!), * explore the process of thinking and get some perspective on your thoughts, * recognise unhelpful patterns of thinking, * interrupt ruminative thoughts with focus on the breath and sensations, * use metaphor as a creative way to interrupt difficult patterns of thinking, * oscillate between 'thinking' and experiencing the present moment, and * effectively label thoughts in order to make space between 'you' and your thoughts.

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WEEK	OUTLINE
6	<p>Mindful Relationships and Kindness & the Intensive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">* pay detailed attention to the 'other',* listen and see others in more flexible and accepting ways,* use mindful contemplation as a way of cultivating acceptance and compassion for yourself and others, and* explore patterns of relating through mindfulness, <p>In the Intensive - we will explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">* cultivating sustained curiosity into the 'waves' of sensations, feelings and thoughts, over the extended time period of the day,* use silence as a path for 'settling' in oneself,* cultivate a sense of community and connectedness through silent practice together, and* develop concentration and strength in practice.
7	<p>Living Your Values:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">* integrate what you have been learning in to daily practice,* reflect on some options about caring for yourself and making choices in life, and* begin practising without the app.
8	<p>Making Mindfulness a Part of Your Life:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">* give your feedback about the course,* explore what you have achieved through the practice,* recognise that living mindfully is a process of ongoing practice,* explore choices about continuing to support this practice in your life, and* pay attention to how it feels to be ending the course.

Contact Details:

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References:

- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). [*Coming to Our Senses: Healing Ourselves and the World Through Mindfulness*](#). New York, USA: Hyperion.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). [*Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*](#). New York, USA: Bantam Dell.