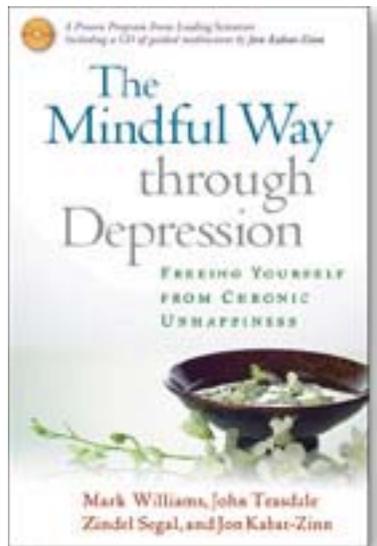




TIP SHEET: MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is becoming an increasingly used strategy for managing mental health. Research data is providing increasing support for its effectiveness. While some people find it beneficial to work on thinking as accurately as possible about situations (aka traditional cognitive therapy), others find it more helpful to practice acceptance strategies. Drs. Zindel Segal, Jon Kabat Zinn, Mark Williams and John Teasdale (key figures in mindfulness-based cognitive therapy) describe mindfulness as being similar to turning off our “automatic pilot.” Think about times when you drive in a car and aren’t really aware of what you are doing (aka “space out”); this happens more than we realize during our daily life, and when we are on automatic pilot we are more likely to have our “buttons pressed” and think about situations in unhelpful ways. As they note, becoming more aware of our thoughts and feelings gives us choices; we do not have to go into the same old “mental ruts” that may have caused problems in the past. Some suggestions for learning mindfulness:

1. Practice mindfulness of breathing (see box to the right).
2. Practice a Body Scan meditation (see the book below or contact us for more information).
3. Choose one routine activity in your daily life and make a deliberate effort to bring moment-to-moment awareness to that activity each time you do it. Activities could include brushing your teeth, bathing, eating, and so on. Simply focus on knowing what you are doing as you are actually doing it. Describe it with all five senses in a nonjudgmental way: Accept that your mind will wander. Just notice it when it occurs, and refocus your attention on the task at hand.



All information in this Tip Sheet was adapted from (and is credited to) the work of Drs. Jon Kabat-Zinn, Zindel Segal, Mark Williams, and John Teasdale. Visit our online bookstore for additional mindfulness titles by these and other authors.

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally. --JON KABAT-ZINN

Mindfulness of Breathing

1. Sit in a comfortable chair or on the floor. Close your eyes.
2. For a minute or two, focus your attention on the sensations of touch and pressure in your body where it makes contact with the floor and whatever you are sitting on.
3. Now focus on the changing physical sensations as breath moves in and out of your body. You may notice the changing sensations in your abdomen, the movement of air in and out of your nose, and so on.
4. Remember that there is no need to try to control your breathing in any way - simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can, also bring this attitude of “allowing” to the rest of your experience. There is nothing to be fixed, no particular state to be achieved. As best you can, simply allow your experience to be your experience, without needing it to be other than it is.
5. Your mind will (frequently) wander away from the focus on the breath in the lower abdomen to thoughts, daydreaming, worries..... This is perfectly normal and expected - it’s what minds do. Simply acknowledge where your mind has been (“I notice I am thinking”). Then, bring your focus back to the changing pattern of physical sensations that come with each in-breath and out-breath.
6. As best you can, bring a nonjudgmental, kind attitude to your mindful breathing practice.
7. Continue with the practice for 15 minutes. Remind yourself from time to time that the intention is simply to be aware of your experience in each moment, as best you can, using the breath as an anchor to gently reconnect with the here and now.
8. Practice this exercise daily. Like any skill, expertise (and benefits) come with practice.