

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction

**The Power Of Staying In The Present
To Counteract The Emotional And
Physical Effects Of Stress On Your
Health**

By The American Institute of Health Care Professionals, Inc.

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The Impact Of Stress

Stress is a normal part of life. We deal with stress in relationships, stress from our workplace, financial stress, and the usual everyday stresses like having problems with time management and rush hour traffic.

Small amounts of stress are not considered dangerous but stress that is extreme or long lasting can cause a variety of health conditions, some of which can lead to death and include:

- Decreased ability to fight off diseases
- Weight gain
- Weight loss
- Decreases healing ability
- Depression
- Hair Loss
- Poorly functioning internal organs
- decreased enjoyment of new experiences
- Increased risk of miscarriage
- Insomnia
- Infertility
- Being in "survival mode" all the time
- Emotional and mood difficulties
- Muscle Pains
- Heart disease
- Diabetes

Because chronic stress is not a benign part of life, anything you can do in order to reduce the level in your life will help improve your quality of life.

You can do things that automatically reduce your stress, such as getting rid of that annoying boyfriend you always fight with, changing jobs, spending more time with loved ones that don't usually stress you, and learning better control over your finances. These may be hard to do but, when you are successful at de-stressing your life, you begin to feel better and have more control over what things you allow to influence your emotions.

You may also practice various techniques that decrease your perception of stress in your life and help you manage stress levels. Things like having a massage, meditation, yoga, tai chi, and qigong can decrease your perception of stress and can help you feel better even with tangible stressors in your life.

There are also mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques that you can practice any time. These techniques can be learned by anyone and will allow you to live in the moment, free of upcoming worries and rumination over past traumas.

What is Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction

Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction or MBSR is a therapeutic program developed by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn. It is a type of complementary medicine that, when practiced regularly, can reduce your chances of coming down with a major chronic disease that has stress as a part of its inception.

MBSR combines mindfulness, yoga, and mind-body exercises to help anyone who is feeling stress. Although, it was initially designed to be used on people who have suffered from a major physical illness or chronic condition, MBSR has been found to reduce anxiety by 58% and stress by 40%.

The program of MBSR is actually an 8-week course in which participants are taught mindfulness meditation, which has its basis in ancient healing therapies. If you take the course, you meet once a week to practice mindfulness skills.

- Mindfulness is a practice that is perfect for enhancing your awareness of the connection between body and mind.
- It also teaches participants that mindfulness helps you understand how things like feelings, unconscious thoughts, and behaviors can adversely affect your physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

It is based on the theory that stress-related conditions can affect the mind and can this can, in turn, influence your physical health.

Yoga is a part of mindfulness practices. It helps increase posture and balance, and helps turn around the high rate of disuse atrophy of our muscles as a result of our largely sedentary lifestyles. People who are suffering from some kind of painful condition or chronic disease. People can take classes on mindfulness stress reduction at more than 200 medical centers and clinics across the country.

Many times, Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction techniques are taught by health professionals, such as psychologists, social workers, nurses, and even doctors who are trained to teach the practices. The work they do is based on a need for a relationship between modern medical practices and the ages-old complementary medical practices. This allows patients to take an active part in their own recovery.

There is a related therapy, which is based on mindfulness-based stress reduction. It involves mindfulness practices and addresses mental issues, such as depression and problems in thinking. It is referred to as Mindfulness based Cognitive Therapy or MBCT. It can teach people what to do when they are overcome by depression by processing their negative thoughts.

Conditions Treated By MBSR

MBSR is used to treat various conditions.

- Chronic Pain
- Heart Disease
- Stress Disorders
- Cancer
- Personal Well-Being
- Anxiety
- Hypertension
- Major Depression
- Diabetes
- Hot Flashes
- Sleep Disturbances
- Mood Disorders
- Fibromyalgia
- HIV
- Gastrointestinal Disorders
- Asthma

Does MBSR Work

Research has been done on MBSR for the past 35 years. It indicates that, when people practice mindfulness techniques, they will demonstrate consistently a reduction in their psychological and medical symptoms, regardless of the disease they have.

It especially works on chronic pain conditions that are notoriously difficult to manage. People who have panic and anxiety as a part of their symptomatology can find relief in MBSR.

There has also been a trend toward gaining an adult-like psychological hardiness when practicing mindfulness stress reduction. There is a larger sense of coherence that seems to last as long as three years after taking the course. There is a heightened sense of self and an ability to function better under higher levels of stress than they were used to being able to handle.

Principles of MBSR

Mindfulness-based stress reduction combines aspects of many other medical and psychological practices, including medicine, psychology, science, and Buddhist meditative practices.

At one point, these things were hardly seen to be related but now, it is found that the mind and body are intricately connected so that, by practicing Buddhist meditation, you can influence the physiology of your body.

Mindfulness is often considered "the heart of Buddhist meditation." This means that it is possible to systematically train your mind and attention toward gaining greater compassion, awareness, and wisdom, which also decreases your perception of stress.

The Basis Of Mindfulness

Mindfulness is felt to be a mental state you can achieve by focusing on the present moment and on focusing your awareness on the thoughts, feelings, and sensation you are experiencing at any given moment.

You become fully present in the moment.

When you are mindfully present, you don't hide what you are feeling or thinking but instead learn how to observe them from a somewhat neutral vantage point.

In a sense, you create a personal space that allows you to respond to new situations in ways that are much less stressed than you have experienced in the past. It is based on the principle that, while people are not always in full control of their life, they can work with their bodies and minds through mindfulness so that they can begin to learn how to live with a lessened degree of anxiety and an increased appreciation of the little things in life.

MBSR as a way of life in its ordinary circumstances is not learned easily. To make it a part of your life, you need to experience training and practice the skills you learn in mindfulness training. **When you begin to practice mindfulness, you are beginning a journey that helps you to really become alive in your life and to live your life to the fullest extent possible.**

Mindfulness as a practice isn't a new thing. As mentioned, it has its origins in Buddhist meditation that has existed for thousands of years. Western medicine has just recently embraced mindfulness and has formalized the practice into coursework and therapy that become MBSR and MBCT, respectively.

You don't need to be particularly spiritual or religious in order to practice mindfulness techniques and enjoy the health benefits that it provides. These types of therapies can be extremely useful if you suffer from depression, anxiety, or stress-related diseases. With mindfulness, you can learn how to take charge of a wide variety of physical conditions. It also aides in having a better sense of wellbeing.

Mindfulness is something everyone can practice, even if they don't suffer from stress, a mental health issue, or a physical illness. It can help everyone enjoy a life that is healthier and more wakeful on a daily basis. It may also help prevent various chronic conditions from occurring, such as heart disease and depression.

Mindfulness can be learned by anyone and at any age. It has been taught to children, young adults, and the elderly—all of whom can benefit from practicing mindfulness. It can be practiced anywhere with life-changing results. There are different means of developing an understanding of mindfulness and of learning how to practice it as a part of your daily life.

The Core Of Mindfulness

The classes that teach MBSR are systematic and well defined. They are based on a patient-centered approach that teaches mindfulness and MBSR intensively to all of its participants. It teaches people how to live lives that are healthier, more adaptive to changes, and reduced in the number and quality of life stressors.

It was initially taught at the Stress Reduction Clinic out of the University of Massachusetts Medical center. Now it is taught in a variety of settings, including athletic programs, prisons, schools, the workplace and in professional programs. It is taught in HMOs and medical centers throughout the world.

Each class is different as it is recognized that there are a variety of ways to structure and teach mindfulness-based learning programs. The way the techniques are taught vary according to the skill level of the teacher, the local milieu, and the prior experience of the participants in mindfulness techniques.

There isn't a cookie-cutter method of teaching mindfulness. Instead, it is encouraged that the teachers make use of the present moment and hear-and-now issues in order to teach the course so that it best relates to its participants. There are, however, several key aspects of Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction therapy that are believed to be universally important, regardless of the way the course is taught in other ways.

The key goals in understanding MBSR include the following:

- There is an emphasis on the importance of each person putting forth an individual effort and to be motivated to practice the discipline of meditation and all its forms. It means that the individual should practice mindfulness even on those days that they don't feel very mindful.
- The experience should be a challenge and it should be fun rather than being a chore. Your life is dealt with mindfully and the practice becomes an adventure in life rather than being something one must do in order to remain healthy. Mindfulness is intended to be a joyous thing.
- There is an importance placed on making every moment count. This is done by carefully and consciously bringing mindfulness into one's awareness as they practice it. When practicing mindfulness, one steps out of the clock and stays only in the present moment.
- There should be a relatively immediate change in lifestyle that must take in order to formally practice mindfulness. It generally requires a large time commitment on the participant. Some teachers recommend practicing mindfulness for 45 minutes daily and for nearly every day of the week (six at the minimum).

- Mindfulness is considered an educational program rather than a therapeutic program. This entails the use of classes of participants that are not small in number. In these large classes, the individuals develop a sense of community as they learn and practice mindfulness together. Healing requires social and emotional support so, by teaching mindfulness in a larger group, people can learn from each other and can aid in each other's paths toward healing. People tend to learn mindfulness better in an environment where there are others to share the experience with.
- Mindfulness is practiced in an environment where there are many medical diseases involves and patients are in varying degrees of discomfort. These people, despite their differences, learn mindfulness together without segregating the patients according to their diagnosis. This focuses on what people have in common with one another rather than on their differences. There are specialized support groups for people with varying health conditions that can be attended along with mindfulness teaching.

This is how mindfulness differs from the traditional and medical scientific models that are more focused on the disease process rather than on the person as a whole.

According to those who teach mindfulness, things like pain, illness, and stress are common to many physical ailments, which is why mindfulness can work on just about anyone at any stage in their disease process.

In mindfulness teachings, participants share the experience of having a body, being alive, thinking, breathing, feeling, and perceiving the flow of thoughts that can occur during times of mental distress, such as worry, irritation, anxiety, frustration, depression, anger, helplessness, joy, and despair. The focus in mindfulness practices is on healing rather than curing disease.

Scientific Evidence For MBSR

MBCT has been studied at the Oxford Centre for Mindfulness. They found some interesting things about mindfulness, including the following:

- Mindfulness has the ability to prevent depressive episodes in people who have suffered from depression in the past.
- For those who have had 3 or more depressive episodes in the past, the use of MBCT reduces the rate of recurrence of depression over the next twelve months by 40-50 percent when compared to the usual treatments for depression.
- MBCT is just as effective at decreasing the number of depressive episodes, as can antidepressants. This was found in a randomized clinical trial on depressed patients.
- The UK's National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence has endorsed MBCT in their Guidelines for the Management of Depression for people who have had at least 3 past episodes of depression.

There was also a research study by the University of Oxford in 2013 that showed benefit to taking the Be Mindful Online class. The study looked at the effectiveness of mindfulness teachings on 273 participants. The study noted that, in those who completed the course, there was a 58 percent reduction in levels of anxiety, a 40 percent reduction in stress, and a 57 percent reduction in depression when compared to the person's state of mind before taking the course.

How To Get Started

Mindfulness can be learned in a variety of ways. MBSR is offered as live classes and retreats in various locations around the US, online options are also available, and in books, audio, and video.

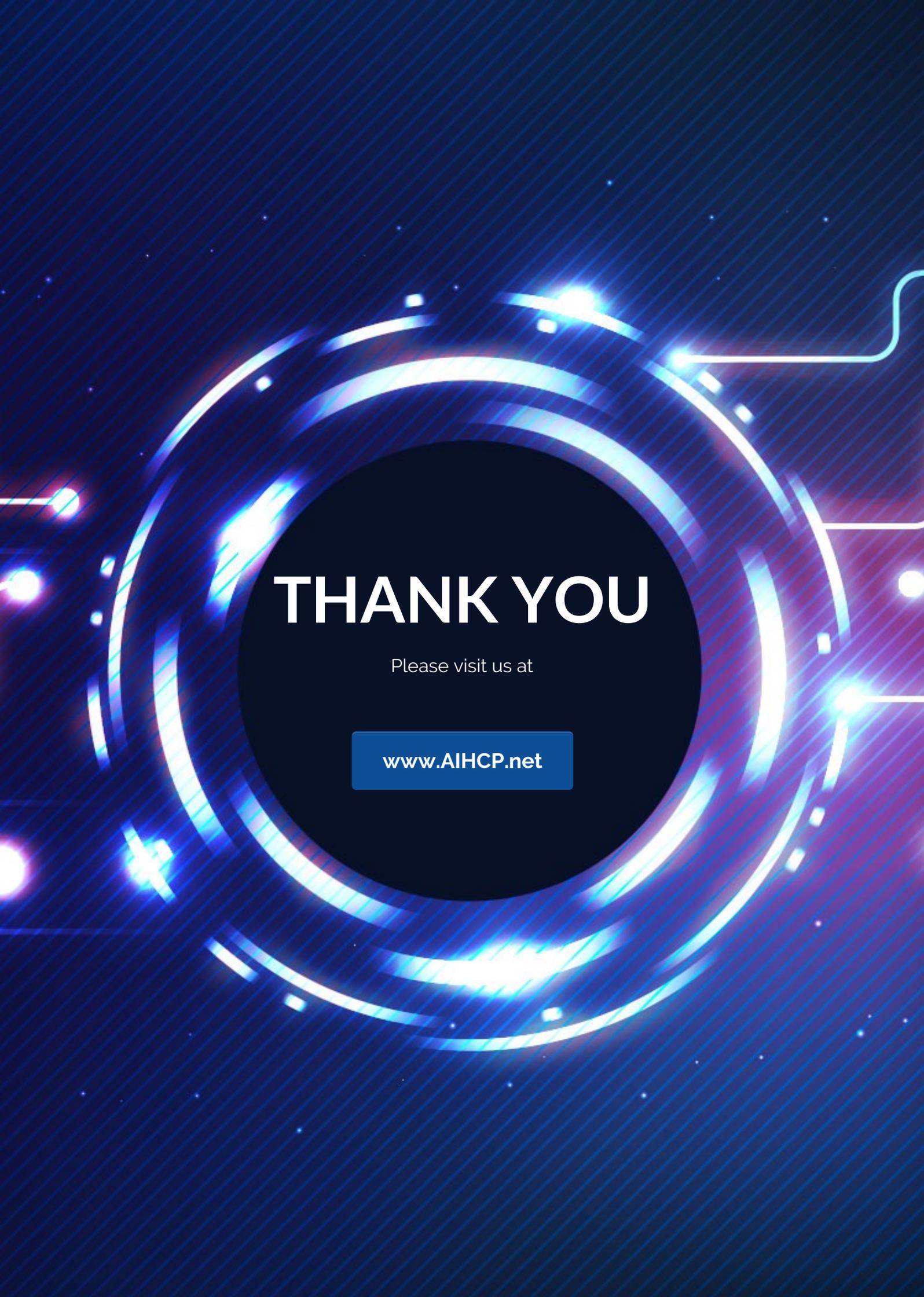
When you learn mindfulness through books, CDs, and tapes, you can practice the techniques in the privacy of your own home.

Conclusion

Mindfulness has its origins in Buddhist meditation but it is now used as a healing technique for people suffering from chronic illnesses.

Those who practice mindfulness learn to live in the present moment and have lessened degrees of stress, anxiety, and depression.

Being an all-natural method, there are no downsides or side effects, making MBSR a very viable and smart consideration in managing stress.



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