

Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction

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Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is a structured complementary medicine program that uses mindfulness meditation in an approach that focuses on alleviating pain and improving physical and emotional well-being for individuals suffering from a variety of diseases and disorders. The program was established by Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

(MBSR) programs last eight to ten weeks and consist of 2.5 hour weekly classes along with a single all-day class. and today 15,000 people have taken an eight-week course in the practice.

While mindfulness meditation has its roots in Buddhist teachings, Jon Kabat-Zinn has said that his program is not spiritually based, and is therefore open to everyone no matter what life circumstances they are in. MBSR is practiced by those old and young, sick and healthy, professionals and monks alike. Jon Kabat-Zinn has also said that the principles of mindfulness, on which MBSR is based, have been most clearly articulated by those in Buddhist traditions. Today mindfulness has gained widespread practice in the medical community, and has many modern applications in health science.

What is Mindfulness-based stress reduction?

The principle of MBSR is mindfulness, which Jon Kabat-Zinn defines as a moment-to-moment non-judgmental awareness. In an introductory speech he gave on the topic of MBSR, Jon gives an example of mindfulness from Sufi poetry, comparing the mind, the body, to a guesthouse and the principle of mindfulness being inviting in all the feelings and thoughts of life, as if they were guests to your house, rolling out the welcome mat in a manner of speaking and reveling in their existence. This whole approach would be seen as sort of the opposite of the rejection or questioning, or hatred and aversion, to our thoughts, feelings, any objects of mind like visualizations, or sensations, and also to actions or people and external objects as well.

MBSR is, as described in a 2003 meta-review of current scientific literature on Mindfulness-based stress reduction, "MBSR is a group program that focuses upon the progressive acquisition of mindful awareness, of mindfulness. The construct of mindful awareness originated in earliest Buddhist documents but is neither religious nor esoteric in nature. Several Buddhist treatises detail an elaborate psychological theory of mind, in which mindfulness consistently plays a central role. Mindfulness is characterized by dispassionate, nonevaluative and sustained moment-to-moment awareness of perceptible mental states and processes. This includes continuous, immediate awareness of physical sensations, perceptions, affective states, thoughts, and imagery. Mindfulness is nondeliberative: It merely implies sustained paying attention to ongoing mental content without thinking about, comparing or in other ways evaluating the ongoing mental phenomena that arise during periods of practice. Thus, mindfulness may be seen as a form of naturalistic observation, or participant-observation, in which the objects of observation are the

perceptible mental phenomena that normally arise during waking consciousness."

Benefits

The program is visited by many individuals, ranging from those who are sick, mentally or physically, to professionals and businessmen. The reason for this is that mindfulness-based stress reduction programs have a variety of very powerful benefits for those practicing the techniques and meditation offered. These benefits include an increase in the body's immune system's ability to ward off disease, a shift from a disposition towards right prefrontal cortex, associated with anxiety, depression, and aversion, to the left prefrontal cortex, associated with happiness, flow, and enjoyment. Other benefits include a different and less invasive way of healing patients with chronic pain related illnesses, a reduction in debilitating stress and the hormones that come along with it, (such as cortisol,) and an improvement in one's overall happiness and well-being in life.

In the conclusion of "Mindfulness-based stress reduction and health benefits: A meta-review", the 2003 meta-review mentioned earlier, we read, "Our findings suggest the usefulness of MBSR as an intervention for a broad range of chronic disorders and problems. In fact, the consistent and relatively strong level of effect sizes across very different types of sample indicates that mindfulness training might enhance general features of coping with distress and disability in everyday life, as well as under more extraordinary conditions of serious disorder or stress. Another recently published study employing different inclusion criteria and a somewhat divergent strategy also provides additional support for the effectiveness of mindfulness interventions. In both investigations, improvements were consistently seen across a spectrum of standardized mental health measures including psychological dimensions of quality of life scales, depression, anxiety, coping style and other effective dimensions of disability. Likewise, similar benefits were also found for health parameters of physical well-being, such as medical symptoms, sensory pain, physical impairment, and functional quality-of-life estimates..."