Mindfulness, Addiction & the Path to Recovery

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“When meditation is mastered, the mind is unwavering like the flame of a candle in a windless place.”

- Bhagavad Gita

“Meditation is a way for nourishing and blossoming the divine within you.”

- Amit Ray, Indian author and spiritual master
Stress & the Emotional Benefits of Mindful Practice

Data shows that Mindful Practice is associated with many health benefits including stress reduction.

Strong connection between stress, substance use and risk of relapse.

The Emotional Benefits of Meditation

- Reduces stress and anxiety
- Increases happiness and optimism
- Helps create loving, harmonious relationships
- Increases life satisfaction
- Produces a deep state of peace and wellbeing
- Increases resilience in hard times
- Reduces impulsivity, cravings, and addictions

Ref: chopracentermeditation.com
“Mind body interventions have been shown to decrease the frequency and intensity of medical symptoms and improve patient disease management.”

– Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine, Massachusetts General Hospital
Mindfulness: The Path to Good Health

- Mindfulness = paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present, without judgement

- MBM is the self-care aspect of Medicine designed to reduce stress and build resiliency, and thereby promote health and prevent illness

60-90% of healthcare visits are related to stress-induced conditions
Stress and Illness

Psychosocial Stress

Cellular Oxidative Stress (i.e. cell damage)

Disease
Health conditions caused or exacerbated by stress:

- Hypertension
- Cardiac Arrhythmias
- Chronic Pain
- Insomnia
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Infertility
- Cancer & AIDS Therapy side effects
- Preparation for Surgery
- ADDICTION
Link between stress and substance use is well-established:

- Stress is a well-known risk factor in the development of addiction
- Stress is a risk factor for relapse
- Examples of stressors commonly experienced by individuals with substance use disorders:
  - Hunger
  - Poverty
  - Homelessness
  - Incarceration
  - Abuse
“Relaxation Response”

- Coined by MGH physician, Dr. Herbert Benson

- Physical state of deep rest that changes the physical & emotional responses to stress
  \(\rightarrow\) \(\rightarrow\) **Opposite** of the ‘fight or flight’ response

- Breaks the train of everyday thought
Relaxation Response

“If all you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail.”

- Abraham Maslow, U.S. psychologist
Basic Components to Elicit the RR:

1. Nonjudgmental (receptive) awareness
2. Comfortable position
3. Mental focus, i.e. repetition of a word, sound, prayer, thought, phrase or muscular activity
4. Quiet environment
5. Passive return to the repetition when other thoughts intrude
Relaxation Response

Techniques used to elicit RR:

• Meditation (mantra, transcendental, mindfulness)
• Yoga (kundalini, kripalu)
• Prayer
Benefits:

- Change physical symptoms, e.g. IBS, HTN, nausea, insomnia, etc.
- ↓ pain & use of pain medications
- ↓ anxiety & fear
- Alleviate depression & anger
- Prepare for & experience medical procedures, treatments & tests
Mindfulness: The Path to Good Health

Benefits: (cont’d)

- Promote healing & recovery
- Increase self-awareness
- Change negative thought patterns
- Increase feelings of wellbeing, comfort & control
- Enhance inner strength, self-esteem, optimism & resiliency
Term “yoga” 1st appeared in Hindu scripture *Katha Upanishad* (400 BCE)

**Benefits:**

1. Reduced stress & ‘fight or flight’ symptoms (sympathetic nervous system)
2. Lower resting heart rate
3. Reduced adrenaline, increased serotonin
4. Improved fitness
5. Reduced depression, anxiety, pain, insomnia
6. Reduced risk factors for chronic diseases (e.g. HTN, heart disease)

Ref: Harvard Medical School Guide to Yoga, 2017
Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction

Developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD, Stress Reduction Clinic, Univ of Massachusetts Medical School

- PhD in molecular biology from MIT and long-time student of Eastern philosophy

“...mindfulness is not merely a good idea or a nice philosophy. If it is to have any value for us at all, it needs to be embodied in our everyday lives, to whatever degree we can manage without forcing or straining.” -Jon Kabat-Zinn
Mindfulness-Based Interventions

Program by Jon Kabat-Zinn:

MBIs including MBSR (mindfulness-based stress reduction) & MBCT (mindfulness-based cognitive therapy):

• 8 weekly 2-2.5 hour classes w/ ~12 patients
• 1-day retreat
• Key feature: formal & informal mindfulness meditation practices to train **attentional control** and **nonjudgmental attitudinal** aspects
Mindfulness: The Path to Good Health

Mindfulness & Addiction: Science

A new field of study but great deal of scientific research shows promising results:

Studies indicate that Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) reduce substance misuse and craving by modulating cognitive, affective and psychophysiological processes integral to self-regulation and reward processing.

- Significantly lower rates of substance use over 4-month period
- Greater decrease in cravings vs control group
- Increase in acceptance and acting with awareness
Mindfulness-oriented recovery enhancement for chronic pain and prescription opioid misuse: Results from an early-stage randomized controlled trial.

- Significantly less stress arousal
- Less desire for opioids
- Greater reduction in pain severity
Effects of Mindfulness on Addictive Behaviors

Ref: Eric Garland, Matthew Howard. Addiction Science & Clinical Practice. 2018
Benefits:

1. Emotional:
   - building skills to manage stress
   - focusing on the present
   - Reducing negative emotions

2. Medical:
   - Manage symptoms for anxiety, asthma, cancer, depression, heart disease, hypertension, pain, insomnia
Mindfulness as a Vehicle for Recovery

• We know that adopting a wellness lifestyle is integral to recovery

• A healthy lifestyle cannot be completely obtained through an 8-week intervention, but over the course of an entire lifetime (e.g. nutritious meals, regular exercise)

• Similarly, mindfulness should be practiced daily (or near daily) to achieve long-lasting therapeutic effects and maintain recovery, esp’ly in view of the chronic nature of addiction

Ref: Jacobson, Greenley. Psych Serv. 2001
Challenges to Mindfulness

Lack of time
“Wandering mind” or intrusive thoughts
Past memories/emotions resurface
“Can’t sit still,” restlessness
Falling asleep
Environmental noises
Common Misconceptions

“I shouldn’t have thoughts when I meditate”

“My body should be still and relaxed”

“The surroundings should be completely quiet”

“I shouldn’t be emotional and cry or get anxious or angry”
“Most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.”

- Abraham Lincoln, U.S. President
Mindfulness & Happiness

Happy People:

- Appreciate themselves and others
- Perceive the world in a positive way
- Live in the moment
- Live in satisfaction
- Don’t compare themselves to others
- Don’t allow negative circumstances define them
- Are less reactive and less regretful
1. **Honor the food**  
   – we take food for granted in a land of abundance
2. **Engage all your senses**  
   – aroma, touch, sound, taste, beauty of the food
3. **Be mindful of portion size**  
   – start with a modest amount (start with a smaller plate)
4. **Chew**  
   – activates enzymes, improves digestion
5. **Eat slowly**  
   – helps us enjoy food, and eat less
6. **Don’t skip meals**  
   – we eat more when we’re hungry and tired
7. **Eat a plant-based diet**  
   – red meat can increase risk of diseases such as colon cancer
A Few Lasting Thoughts...

- The study of mindfulness as a treatment for stress and chronic pain is over 30 years old; 20+ years for depression

- But the research in the role of mindfulness in treating addiction has proliferated only in the last 10 years

- Promising new treatment approach with several key findings:
  - Decreased cravings
  - Decreased substance misuse

References

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- [www.Mindful.org](http://www.Mindful.org)
Thank You !!!

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