

Wellness through Mindfulness

An Online Self-Paced Mindfulness Training Program

with

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Wellness through Mindfulness Course Overview

The Wellness through Mindfulness Course approaches mindfulness as the life skill that it truly is. It can serve as an introduction to mindfulness for beginners or as a refresher for students of mindfulness and seasoned practitioners familiar with the foundational principles of mindfulness.

Using mindfulness practices as the entry point, over the next eight weeks, we will focus on strengthening your ability to concentrate and systematically expand your focus of attention. You'll learn about the physiological and psychological bases of stress reactivity while experiencing mindful meditations for responding in positive, proactive ways to stressful situations.

Lesson 1: Introduction to Mindfulness

Here you will receive an overview of the course and establish the learning context for the rest of your experience. You will learn the theory and scientific evidence supporting mind-body medicine and how mental and physical structures of the body drive our lives. Through your own experience of the mindful eating and mindful breathing practices, you will begin to be introduced to what it means to be fully engaged in the present moment.

Lesson 2: The Mind-Body Connection

In this lesson, you'll practice two distinct yet interrelated mindfulness practices—the Body Scan Meditation then the Awareness of the Breath Sitting Meditation. You will learn to use the Body Scan Meditation as a means to get to know how the body typically reacts to stressful situations. Changing the way you perceive and respond to difficulties and challenges will impact the short and long-term effects of stress on your mind and body.

Lesson 3: Perception

Perception is key in mindfulness—how you see things (or don't see them) will determine in a large part how you respond. This week's lesson and practices will ask you to examine your perceptions, assumptions, and the way you view the world. You will discover that there is both pleasure and power in being present—you'll directly attend to and investigate how your experiences create such reactions as pleasure or discomfort in the mind and body through Mindful Movement.

Lesson 4: Exploring the Unwanted

By practicing mindfulness, we cultivate curiosity and openness to the full range of our experience, and through this process you strengthen your ability to pay attention and can already begin to start decreasing your stress levels. This week, your practice will focus on the development of your ability to concentrate and systematically expand your field of awareness in every moment of our lives. You'll learn about the physiological and psychological bases of stress reactivity, and experience more mindful strategies for responding in positive, proactive ways to stressful situations.

Lesson 5: Creative Responding

This week you will begin to pay attention to the places where you might be stuck in repeating, unhealthy patterns that you can disarm through mindful awareness. You will also practice how to apply mindfulness at the critical moment when you experience a physical sensation, intense emotion, or condition, with special attention to exploring the effect of reactivity as it shows up in your life.

Lesson 6: Building Resilience

Resilience or “stress hardiness” is our ability to return to a state of balance after stressful situations. This week, you will focus on coping strategies to strengthen your inner resources and enhance your resilience through mindfulness practice. We’ll discuss “propositional or doing mode,” the part of the brain. This part of the brain specializes in rationalizing, criticizing, analyzing, which unchecked can cause high levels of anxiety and dissatisfaction. And we’ll explore the “implicational or being mode” which is the part of the brain that leverages sensory cues to recognize what is going on in the moment. We’ll reflect on using these different thinking approaches at different times to yield better results.

Lesson 7: Making Skillful Choices

Mindfulness is most effective when it is a lifetime commitment. Throughout our journey, you have been exploring the many ways that you can integrate mindfulness more fully and personally into your life and how they can support all aspects of your life. This week you’ll completely take charge, asking yourself, “What’s most appropriate for me right now?” you’ll decide how you’d like to approach both your formal and informal practices bringing a broader sense of awareness and presence to every moment in your life. I encourage you to use non-judgmental mindfulness in your self-reflection and decision-making processes. You’ll leverage your ability to maintain the discipline and flexibility of your daily practice as circumstances change while testing the waters for using mindfulness as a method of approaching the rest of your life.

Lesson 8: Life Is the Practice

In the final week of the program, you will have a complete review of everything you’ve learned, with an emphasis on carrying the momentum you’ve built forward into the coming months and years. I’ll present even more ways and resources available to you to take mindfulness in new directions in your life and as practice evolves. I’ll also suggest support systems that exist to help you continue to integrate, learn, and grow. The final lesson creates a satisfying closure by honoring both the end of this program and the beginning of the rest of your life.

Getting Started

Here you will receive an overview of the course and establish the learning context for the rest of your experience:

Course Flow

- This course is organized by lessons and topics.
 - Each week there is a lesson and within each lesson there are several topics. The lesson and topics are number (e.g. L1, L2, L3, etc. and T1, T2, T3 etc.)
 - For easy reference, as you go through the course, each lesson will begin with its number and title (e.g. Lesson 1: Introduction to Mindfulness) and each topic will reference both the lesson and topic number (e.g. L1 T1 – Foundations of Mindfulness.)
 - Each lesson builds on the lesson before it and each topic builds on the topic before it. So to get the most out of the course follow the lessons and associated topic sequentially.
- Once you have completed a lesson, click on the Complete & Continue link at the bottom of the page to begin the next lesson.
- If you desire to return to a lesson, go to the navigation on the left and click on the respective lesson or topic on the left sidebar.

Journaling

- Journaling is a wonderful way to deepen your understanding of new material and to integrate it into your daily life. Throughout this course I will provide questions and inquiries for your reflection.
- I invite you to use your preferred journaling method—whether that is pen and paper, a Word doc, or an online tool—to reflect on your experience and capture your thoughts as you progress through the program.

How to Watch and Listen to a Lesson

In this online course format, you have control as to when you watch the videos and engage with the other online content—whether you watch all the video segments for a particular lesson within one day or spread them out across several days. Because of this freedom there is a risk that the course work will drag on for you.

I'd like to recommend that you schedule a time in your week to follow all of the lessons material (lessons and practices) within one day, leaving the remaining six days of the week for your home-practice assignments. I realize that you may not be able to complete all of the lectures and guided practices within one sitting. Be gentle with yourself and do the best you can. If you need more time, by all means, allow yourself this extra time.

However, I suggest that you try to complete a lesson within a single seven-day period. This will help maintain and strengthen your focus and engagement with the course while offering you the best opportunity for growth and transformation.

- You can begin watching a lesson video by clicking the play button on the video player image.
- To listen to the audio version of a lesson, use the audio player located to the right of the video player within the Lesson.

[Pamela J. Alexander Bio](#)

With over 20 years of experience as an executive in Fortune 100 companies, then working as an entrepreneur leading her own operations and serving as a board member supporting scrappy non-profits in her community, Pamela J. Alexander understands the impact stress can have on one's life.

At this stage in her career, her mission is to ease stress in the world by providing people with tools and techniques that enable them to cope effectively with the challenges of modern life. Pamela teaches Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and other Mindfulness-Based Programs (MBPs) as well as leads mediation and mindfulness retreats.

Pamela graduated from the University of California, Berkeley and received her MBSR Teacher's credentials from University of Massachusetts Medical School's Center for Mindfulness in collaboration with the Brown University School of Public Health.

Background

History of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

MBSR was originally intended as a public health initiative to shift the “bell curve of humanity towards greater health, wellbeing and wisdom.” (JKZ, 2018). Leveraging his background as a scientist and meditator, John Kabat-Zinn developed the program at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Inspired by his background as a scientist and meditator, Kabat-Zinn’s early research on the program led the way in establishing MBSR helped establish MBSR as viable interventions for a host of physical, emotional and psychological conditions: preventing illness and disease—while cultivating inner resources that support resilience and healthy coping.

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) grew out of the work of Kabat-Zinn. It was originally developed by Professor Mark Williams and John Teasdale of Cambridge University and Zindel Segal of the University of Toronto. MBCT was designed for people with serious depression.

Together MBSR and MBCT are known as Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs). Clinical trials show that they are effective and that they even support coping with chronic, long-standing conditions for which recovery is not possible too. This eight week program draws from both the MBSR and MBCT programs.

From the beginning MBSR was intended to be “a self-educational public health intervention that over time, as more and more people went through it in large numbers, might have the potential to move the bell curve of humanity in the direction of greater health, well-being and wisdom.” My intention is to support Kabat-Zinn’s cause and continue to share programs based on his work as the “self-educational public health intervention” it was always intended to be. May we all be empowered.

Definition of Mindfulness: What it is—and what it isn’t

Kabat-Zinn’s working definition of mindfulness is: *Paying attention in a particular way (through meditation practices) to what’s actually happening in the present moment, with an attitude of non-judging (JKZ, various).* And sometimes as he’s gone on to say, noticing how judging we are with acceptance.

As the cornerstone of what we will explore during this program, paying attention to the details of our lives through meditation adds the dimensions of innateness, relationality, “heartfulness,” and the possibility of growing familiar with how the mind and attention generally function. Acknowledging that there’s no need to “quiet” the mind or stop thinking in order to practice. Rather exploring the noise and the quiet in the mind and body is what we continually explore throughout the program. Mindfulness is not about being Zen or any other way than how you find yourself in the moment.

Time

Finding and making the time for formal practice takes concerted commitment and discipline. There will be times when, for all your efforts, it doesn't happen. But to begin, it's very helpful to consider when and how you'll practice. Choosing a specific space in your house to practice is a good idea. Setting aside at least 30 minutes to practice each day is encouraged. There will be choices to make: getting up earlier, watching less TV or engaging less online. There is great value in giving full priority to the program for the duration of the eight weeks, to better see what is possible through intention and kind discipline.

Possible Risks

Engagement with the entire program might be seen as a risk to one's current lifestyle because of the time and commitment necessary. The practice can exacerbate or bring into one's awareness more strongly physical, emotional, psychological, or relational issues. This is not an exaggeration because while resting in stillness may sound simple, it is, in Kabat-Zinn's words, "the hardest thing in the world to do." By resting in stillness, we start to notice the details of our lives. There is the possibility of touching and practicing the art of being human, and specifically, the art of being truly oneself.

Physical Risks

Participants who have physical conditions, including musculoskeletal conditions, prior injuries or surgeries, pregnancy, or conditions that impact balance or movement should be encouraged to check with their health care provider for adapting any of the Mindful Movement postures. The Mindful Movement Meditation offered may or may not be familiar. However the focus is not on an end goal or specific posture or alignment. The ongoing invitation is to listen deeply to the body during the movement and all during the program and to respond wisely—not forcing, rather hanging out at the boundary of what is possible without going over or pushing through your limits. Stay open to explore what is possible, moment-by-moment.

Emotional/Psychological Risks

When we sit or lie still during practice, experiences that have carried strong emotions or have had a strong psychological impact may surface. These may be events from long ago that have been forgotten, or ones that are known and possibly have been worked with in therapy. More recent events may also arise. Emotions that we thought had been dealt with may arise in connection with these experiences. In addition, all emotions may be felt more strongly as you pay closer attention to your experience. If there has been a recent loss or life change, emotions may be more challenging. These too, may surface during practice. Those who have a history of trauma or abuse or who have a diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder may find some or all of the practices challenging. Contact your health care provider for support during the program. But mindfulness meditation may provide a very real support, even in the midst of such challenges. There are conditions that may make MBI's more difficult such as suicide ideation, using drugs,

alcohol or processes to cope, being in early recovery from an addiction, acute depression, social anxiety, or a recent loss.

Social Risks

The program and the practice may impact family and work relationships, in addition to the need to create time for practice which may hinge on shifting family or work responsibilities, as you practice, you may change in ways that you can't anticipate. Those around you may be surprised or uncomfortable with new behaviors and/or attitudes.

Possible Benefits

Past participants have reported a number of significant benefits, including: improved sense of well-being—even if symptoms and conditions stay the same; symptom reduction; increased focus and reduced distraction; emotional balance; increased joy and contentment; better able to meet high-stress situations and care for oneself in the midst of demands; increased appreciation and awareness of inner and outer resources, and more.

Participants will all have different responses to mindfulness meditation practices. There isn't a linear response to this program— if you do “this,” “that” will happen. So there are no guarantees of any specific outcome. In general, people who practice regularly and consistently report more positive outcomes, but we can't predict outcomes for any individual. And equally important to note there is not one, linear learning experience or integration of the teachings found in the program.

Final Thoughts

No one comes to a mindfulness-based program (MBP) because their lives are perfect. But before you start condemning yourself, know what you are feeling is normal. The body is a beautiful complex, organic and dynamic mechanism designed to navigate the world we live in. The body's responses to stress are known and understood. Be reassured that:

1. Life can indeed be stressful.
2. Stress has causes.
3. Stress can be successfully overcome.
4. And there is a way of managing stress.

As scientists have gained understanding about the patterns of the mind and body, they have also come to recognize that as we can begin to recognize our own patterns. And as we do, we can become more at ease with our patterns. While mindfulness-based interventions and programs cannot make feelings, emotions or physical sensations go away, nor do we want them to, it does offer a method that can liberate you from being controlled and suffering from them.

Introduction to Mindfulness

Lesson 1 : Introduction to Mindfulness

Using mindfulness practices as the entry point, over the next eight weeks, we will focus on the development of your ability to concentrate and systematically expand your focus of attention. You'll learn about the physiological and psychological bases of stress reactivity. We'll use mindful meditations as an entry point to learning how to respond in positive, proactive ways to stressful situations when you're not meditating.

Through your own experience you'll begin to explore what it means to be fully engaged in the present moment via ordinary things, like the body, the breath, sounds and sensations. You'll be introduced to mindful eating and mindful breathing. And in this first session, you will become familiar with the working of autopilot and how to identify it in your life.

L1 T1 – Foundations of Mindfulness

Over the next eight weeks, we will be developing a strong foundation of mindfulness. Jon Kabat-Zinn defines mindfulness as "the awareness that unfolds as we pay attention, on purpose, in the present moment." It's cliché to say it, but the past is gone, and the future has not yet arrived. From that point of view, the present moment is the only time any of us has for perceiving, learning, growing, and healing. It is from the awareness born noticing what's happening right now, that we have the chance to recognize and respond more proactively and effectively to the challenges and demands of everyday life. What we are learning and you will experience for yourself, is that when we are fully aware of the present, we're better equipped to take control of our lives. We are relearning to focus on one thing at a time to harness that power.

From the beginning, we will focus on ways of integrating mindfulness into your life through formal and informal mindfulness practice. "Formal" practice is the time during the day that we set aside to meditate—by practicing a sitting meditation, for example.

"Informal" practice is all the other moments of our day during which we can intentionally focus our attention on the details of our lives—when taking a shower, preparing a meal, speaking with our children and partners, participating in a business meeting, or driving the car are all occasions for being awake and aware. For example, staying in the car—body and mind—while driving, rather than having your bodies in the car and your mind in the office rehearsing what we're going to say in a meeting. During this topic, you will learn to practice the Awareness of the Breath Meditation as a means of becoming familiar with and cultivating awareness (or mindfulness) of the body and using your breath as an anchor to the present.

From this point of view, no matter what challenges you are facing or physical conditions you may be experiencing, "there is more right with you than wrong with you," as Jon Kabat-Zinn says. Likewise, experience shows that the challenges and difficulties you are facing are workable. This has nothing to do with liking these situations or "reframing" them in some fake or insincere way. Rather, it is a perspective that reflects your natural ability to solve problems creatively. This often sleeping genius lives within each of us and can be woken up through the practice of mindfulness.

Questions for Reflection and Journaling

Take a moment to reflect on the following journaling prompts. When ready, turn to your preferred journaling method—whether that is pen and paper, a word doc, or an online tool—to record your responses to the upcoming questions.

- What is your intention for this course?
- What drew you to this program?

Mindfulness is a state that can be cultivated in which one is aware of one's present experience and responds to this experience in a non-judgmental and non-reactive way. The practice of mindfulness often leads to a sense of balance and psychological well-being. To cultivate mindfulness, you don't need to try to create any particular state of mind such as relaxation or focus. Instead, your task is to simply become aware of each thought, feeling, or sensation as it arises in the present moment and to let each thought, sensation, or feeling pass away without judgment, attachment, analysis or criticism. While this is a simple practice, it can be both challenging and transformative. Our usual mode of doing involves replaying scenes from our past and planning for our future. Mindfulness is a tool for training our mind to be fully present with our experiences as they are happening, so we can leverage both the being and doing mode as our bodies were designed. The below meditation will lead you through the process you'll practice again and again throughout the course.

[*Introduction to Mindfulness Meditation*](#)



L1 T2 – Exploring Meditation Postures

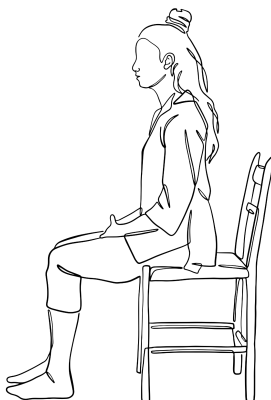
During your meditation practices you will be guiding your mind toward increased awareness and compassion for yourself, so you don't want to begin your practices feeling distracted, uncomfortable or in unnecessary pain. Therefore, the first step of your practice is finding a comfortable position. As with most things in life, there's no one-size-fits-all, so for the purposes of this course, we'll look at variations in sitting and lying down postures. I encourage you to explore these options at the beginning of each practice session seeing what's most appropriate for your body, as your needs may change from day to day.

Throughout this course, you will be invited to explore several body postures for sitting to lying down while engaging with formal mindfulness practices. In this segment, I will verbally explain your options. It will be useful to have a meditation cushion, chair, yoga mat, and blanket with you as you watch this explanation so you can follow along. The invitation is to feel into your body as a way to explore the positions. If you prefer written guidance, line drawings with written instruction are attached.

If, for physical reasons, you are unable to adopt any of these postures, it is okay. Do what you can, exploring the soft edges, which is the space between pushing too hard and not investigating what the body is capable of.

Sitting in a chair

Begin by sitting in a straight back chair with your legs uncrossed, feet planted solidly on the floor, and your arms and hands resting either on the legs or in the lap. Try not to lean against the back of the chair, rather sit in the middle of the chair. If it helps, place a cushion or folded blanket under your sitting bones to tilt your hips forward. You can also put a pillow behind your lower back for support to help keep your back naturally straight (not arched or hunched) and your head and neck aligned with your spine. The idea is to set yourself up so you're comfortable, yet alert while maintaining your posture.



Sitting on a cushion or blanket on the floor

Sit on a cushion or a folded blanket so your knees are lower than your hips. If you're sitting on a hard floor, a rug or blanket under your feet will cushion your ankles. If it helps, put a soft pillow or two behind your lower back to make sure your spine is straight and in an upright position. If sitting cross-legged bothers your knees, stretch your legs out in front of you.



Sitting on a meditation bench or straddling a cushion

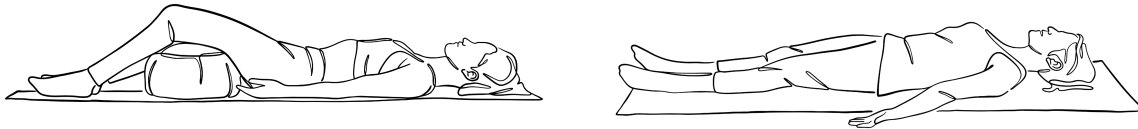
Bend your knees and lay your shins flat on the ground. Sitting on a meditation bench or straddling a cushion, sit back towards your heels and lengthen your spine.

To ensure you have good posture you might try puffing out your chest to lower your shoulders back and down, lightly tucking your chin, and keeping your hips neutral.



Lying down on a mat or a blanket on the floor

Lie on your back with your legs about hip-width apart, toes relaxed and falling to the side, arms extended alongside your body, palms turned up. If it feels more comfortable, try placing a thin pillow under your head and/or behind bending your knees or turning your palms down



Whichever meditation position you choose, the posture pointers are the same: the back is straight yet relaxed, the head and neck are aligned over the spine, and the arms rest either by the sides, on the legs or in the lap. When it comes to your hand positions during meditation, you can either place them on the legs, palms down, or in your lap, palms up, or one hand resting in the other.

L1 T3 – Mindful Eating

Our mindfulness practice begins with a very common activity: eating. To fully participate, here you'll need: a table, a chair, and two or three raisins.

In our mindful eating practice; you're being asked to look at a familiar thing or object in a new way. I'll guide you through this first mindfulness practice, which will involve you becoming more familiar with a very familiar object, a raisin.

Mindful Eating Practice



Questions for Reflection and Journaling

Take a moment to reflect on the following journaling prompts. When you're ready, turn to your preferred journaling method—whether that is pen and paper, a word doc, or an online tool—to record your responses to the following questions. You can write or draw, whatever is most appropriate for you.

- What was your experience of eating with so much focused attention on a single object?
- What was your *expectation* of eating the raisin and the *actual* experience of eating the raisin?
- What, if anything, surprised you about this practice?
- Were there elements of this practice that you found challenging, difficult, or easy?

L1 T4 – Exploring Autopilot

The term 'automatic pilot' describes a state of mind in which one acts without conscious intention or awareness of present-moment sensory perception. The defining feature of being on autopilot is that your awareness of the present moment is clouded.

Themes in Mindfulness: Autopilot



L1 T5 – Awareness of the Breath Sitting Meditation

We will now do a formal mindfulness meditation, the Awareness of the Breath Sitting Meditation. This practice will begin to help you establish a relationship with your breath by helping you become familiar with the subtler parts of yourself. Be sure to have a mat or blanket to lie down on and about ten minutes during which you will not be disturbed (you might want to turn off your cell phone).

Awareness of the Breath Sitting Meditation



Questions for Reflection and Journaling

Before we move on, we would like you to take a moment to reflect back on your experience during Week One. Please reflect on your experience doing ordinary activities mindfully (eating and breathing) and in some ways differently.

- What was this experience like for you?
- Was anything surprising? Difficult?
- Did you notice thoughts and/or emotions during the practice?

L1 T6 – Lesson One Closing

At the end of each lesson, we will review the themes presented and the home practice for the following six days of the week. As already mentioned, I recommend that you complete the online lesson within one day, and then use the remaining six days of the week for home practice. This is only a recommendation. In the end, you're responsible for organizing your practice time in a way that suits your life. Please create a schedule and a system that is sustainable for you. I invite you to think of arranging your time as a part of the practice with you intentionally deciding how best to integrate this course into your life for the next eight weeks.

This week we reviewed postures, so you can find a position that is most suited for your body. We did a mindful-eating Raisin Meditation practice as a way to prepare us to look at autopilot and its impact on our lives. Then we closed with an Awareness of the Breath Sitting Meditation practice. Now let's go over the weekly homework assignments.

Week One Review



Home Practice Assignments for Week One

Formal practice: Following the downloadable audio or video online, follow the [Awareness of the Breath Sitting Meditation](#), twice daily for 6 of 7 days

Informal practice: Mindful awareness of ordinary things (eating, brushing teeth, taking a shower, washing dishes, cutting veggies, etc.): carry out one routine thing paying special attention to the details of doing it.

As a reminder, don't forget to find time in the day dedicated to practicing. Make changes to your schedule to support practice: maybe going to bed earlier, so you can get up earlier, perhaps negotiating with your family for time alone. As you progress through the week, notice how it is for you to integrate moments of mindfulness into your daily activities? What are some of those activities? How would you describe your attention (focused, unfocused, fuzzy, foggy, clear, etc.)? Does your deliberate attention to these moments alter your experience in any way? If so, how?

Congratulations on completing Week One.