Using Mindfulness Practices During COVID-19 Pandemic

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Even before the arrival of COVID-19, stress had already been identified as a major health problem for Americans. Not only do we need to care for health and wellness when there is illness, but we also need to practice preventive care to stay well physically, mentally and emotionally.

The definition of mindfulness by Jon Kabat-Zinn is probably the most popular explanation of mindfulness in the United States of America: “Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.”

What are some examples of mindfulness practice?

- Breathing exercises
    - For example, **JustBreathe** is a small, simple graphic to help you sync your breathing. Watch and follow with your inhales and exhales at yp4h.osu.edu/justbreathe.
- Body scan meditation
- Imagery exercises
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Mindful eating
- Intentional time with loved ones
- Focus on gratitude
- Yoga, tai chi, walking or other physical activity

(please see links below for clear instructions on different types of mindfulness practices)

At a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has changed everything in daily life for Ohioans, learning and practicing mindfulness can offer opportunities to better weather the challenging times as well as to be more present for big and small celebrations.

How do I get started in practicing mindfulness?

While the early mindfulness trainings in the United States of America, led by Kabat-Zinn and other professionals were often face-to-face instruction with many hours committed to trainings, now there are additional ways to learn about and practice mindfulness. Although some individuals prefer an in-person class, during this unprecedented time in which it is necessary to create physical distance between people, individual study or self-help resources may include books and workbooks, on-line trainings, apps and audio-visual materials. The resources listed below are free ways to practice mindfulness as well as respect the guidelines for social distancing.

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Resources Specific to COVID-19 and Stress

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, COVID-19 Manage Anxiety & Stress cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety
- The Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Coronavirus Information, Families, Children and Adults, COVID-19 and Anxiety mha.ohio.gov
- Mayo Clinic COVID-19: Tips for Mindfulness & Coping with Anxiety. newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/discussion/covid-19-tips-for-mindfulness-coping-with-anxiety
- Ohio State University Chief Wellness Officer Bernadette Melnyk, PhD, APRN-CNP, FAANP, FNAP, FAAN, Key Strategies for Relieving Anxiety During the COVID-19 Pandemic recording go.osu.edu/copingwithcovid19

Mindfulness Resources from Ohio State University Extension

- Follow the Live Smart Ohio Mind and Body Blog livesmartohio.osu.edu/category/mind-and-body as well as Live Smart Ohio livesmartohio.osu.edu
- Live Healthy Live Well - choose to follow the blog, sign up for annual online email challenge ortexts, and follow on Facebook, fcs.osu.edu/programs/nutrition/live-healthy-live-well
- OSU Extension Fact Sheets related to mindfulness, 2016:
    - Introduction to Mindfulness ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/hyg-5243-0
    - Stress Coping Methods ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/hyg-5242
    - Eating Healthy During Stressful Times ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/hyg-5244
    - Helping Children Through Stressful Times ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/flm-fs-8-99-r07

Online resources from universities

- OSU Wexner Medical Center Mindfulness – free practices wexnermedical.osu.edu/integrative-complementary-medicine/mindfulness-practices
- University of Virginia School of Medicine – free audio med.virginia.edu/mindfulness-center/continue-your-practice/audio-recordings
- UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center, free guided meditations marc.ucla.edu/mindful-meditations (in English and Spanish audio)
- Dr. Benzo's Mindful Breathing Lab at Mayo Clinic mayo.edu/research/labs/mindful-breathing/audio-files

Mindfulness practices are not exclusive to adults

- Penn State Extension, How to Incorporate Mindfulness Practices into 4-H Settings extension.psu.edu/how-to-incorporate-mindfulness-practices-into-4-h-settings
- Ohio State University Extension, 4-H, Teen Leadership 20, Mindfulness, Breathe Deeply ohio4h.org/sites/ohio4h

Mindful Eating

Recognizing that emotional eating and mindless eating might be prevalent at this time of high stress, these informative links address our mind and body health and the relationship with food and eating.

- Ohio State University Extension, Live Smart Ohio, Mindful Eating: Revitalize Your Relationship with Food, livesmartohio.osu.edu/food/even-2osu-edu/mindful-eating-revitalize-your-relationship-with-food
- Mississippi State University Extension, Stress and Emotional Eating extension.msstate.edu/publications/information-sheets/stress-and-emotional-eating
- Mayo Clinic, Weight loss: Gain control of emotional eating, mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/weight-loss/in-depth/weight-loss/art-20047342
- Harvard Health Publishing, Harvard Medical School, Why stress causes people to overeat, health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/why-stress-causes-people-to-overeat
- University of Rochester Medical Center, Emotional Eating: How to Cope urmc.rochester.edu/encyclopedia
- Teens Health, Emotional Eating kidshealth.org/en/teens/emotional-eating.html

Looking for a short, sample exercise? DeStress Monday shares how to do a one-minute meditation practice. destressmonday.org/one-minute-meditations-just-need-minute

> Remember, just as learning any new skill like cooking, swimming, or riding a bike, mindfulness takes time and practice. Please consider listening to a download for a few times before you decide it's not for you. Once you've discovered some of your favorite ways to practice mindfulness, keep it up!

This article was edited by Christine Kendle, Shannon Carter, Pat Holmes and Emily Drerup, and reviewed by members of the Mindful Wellness team.