

Mindfulness and Meditation

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*Lately there has been a lot of positive attention paid to mindfulness and meditation in the popular press. While the terms *mindfulness* and *meditation* are often used interchangeably, they are not the same thing. Both positively impact physical, emotional, and psychological wellbeing; applications for meditation and mindfulness have found been in education, athletics, business, and many forms of healthcare... Both meditation and mindfulness practice build cognitive and emotional fitness; they develop the strength, flexibility, agility, focus, and endurance that is required to respond to life's challenges with awareness, acceptance, curiosity, compassion, and gratitude...*

Meditation is the intensive practice of setting aside time to pay attention. There are many types of meditation – some focus on a bodily sensation such as the breath or heartbeat, some use a mantra or chant, and some use prayer. Some people set aside time each day – 5 to 40 minutes – to meditate... sitting silently and paying attention to your experience can be a wonderful change of pace from the pervasive busyness of life. Most of us only practice busyness and distraction from busyness – usually in some electronic or chemical form. Meditation is not a distraction or an escape, it is an opportunity to observe internal busyness and the quiet that sits beneath it.

Mindfulness, on the other hand, is the practice of intentionally bringing accepting awareness to whatever is at hand... Mindfulness can be practiced thousands of times a day in any circumstance. The key to mindfulness practice is not duration – it is not an Olympic endurance sport meant to grind on for hours with lots of sweat and grunting. The key to mindfulness is frequency, consistency, and compassion. Each time you become aware that your mind has wandered away from the life you are living in this moment, you simply bring it back. Moreover, you can do this with a gentle smile – a smile of gratitude for having noticed an opportunity to practice, and a smile of acceptance for the fact that you have a human mind that naturally wanders.