

The Mindful Clinician: Integrating Mindfulness into Primary Care for Pain and Beyond

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Objectives

1. Describe the evidence-based benefits of mindfulness for chronic pain management and overall well-being in both patients and healthcare workers.
2. Demonstrate practical mindfulness techniques that can be easily integrated into brief primary care encounters.
3. Apply strategies for using mindfulness to support healthcare worker resilience and reduce burnout in the primary care setting.

Disclosures

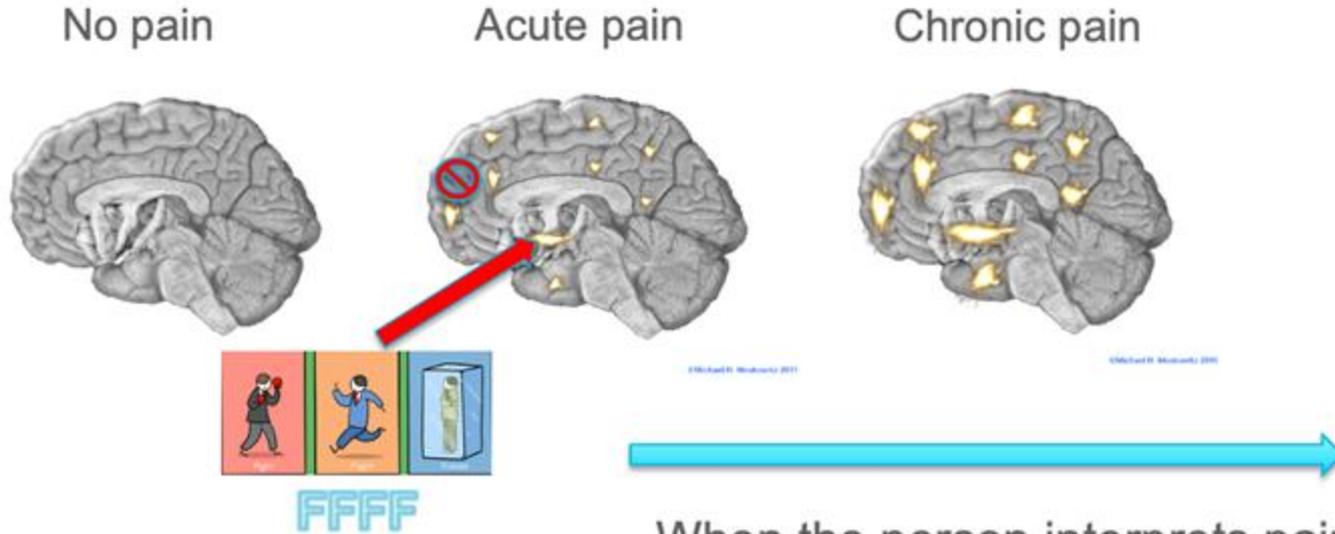
No disclosures to report

Benefits of Mindfulness for Chronic Pain

The Scope of the Problem: Chronic Pain

- Chronic pain affects over 100 million Americans and 1.5 billion people worldwide
- Chronic pain costs the United States approximately \$635 billion per year in medical expenses and lost work productivity
- Chronic pain is the leading cause of disability in the United States

How Chronic Pain Develops



When the person interprets pain as a signal that a threat is present, focuses on pain sensations, and/or catastrophizes, pain and the increased the alarm system response gets “wired” into the brain over time

What is Mindfulness?

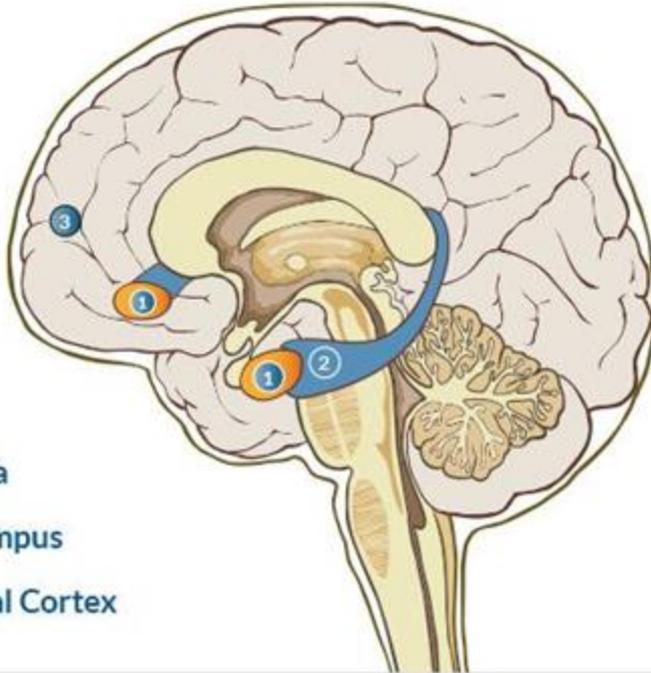
A mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations



In other words...

Mindfulness is the ability to know what is happening in your head and body at any given moment, without getting carried away by it.

Mindfulness Changes the Brain for the Better



1: Mindfulness practice leads to *less* activity in the amygdala, or “fight or flight” (anxiety, fear, anger) center of your brain

2: Mindfulness practice leads to *more* activity in the hippocampus, or “learning and memory” part of your brain

3: Mindfulness practice leads to *more* activity in the prefrontal cortex, or “logical, higher-order thinking” part of your brain, which helps you focus, learn new information, plan, and organize.

Mindfulness Practice and Reduced Pain

- Mindfulness meditation produced significantly greater reductions in pain intensity and pain unpleasantness ratings and nociceptive-specific and negative affective pain signatures than placebo cream, sham mindfulness meditation, and control interventions. (Riegner et al., 2025)
- A mindfulness-based pain management program produced moderate to large effects in improvement of pain management and acceptance, use of analgesics, psychopathological symptoms, general negative thoughts, self-blame, mental-health-related quality of life, and resilience. (Pérez-Fernández et al., 2022)

Mindfulness Practice and Reduced Pain

- Mindfulness meditation has been found attenuate pain through mechanisms including enhanced cognitive and emotional control, as well as altering the contextual evaluation of sensory events. (Zeidan et al., 2012)
- Pain perception studies highlighted that mindfulness practices foster pain acceptance and modify pain control beliefs, serving as key mediators in improving pain outcomes. (Ploesser & Martin, 2024)

Brief Mindfulness Techniques

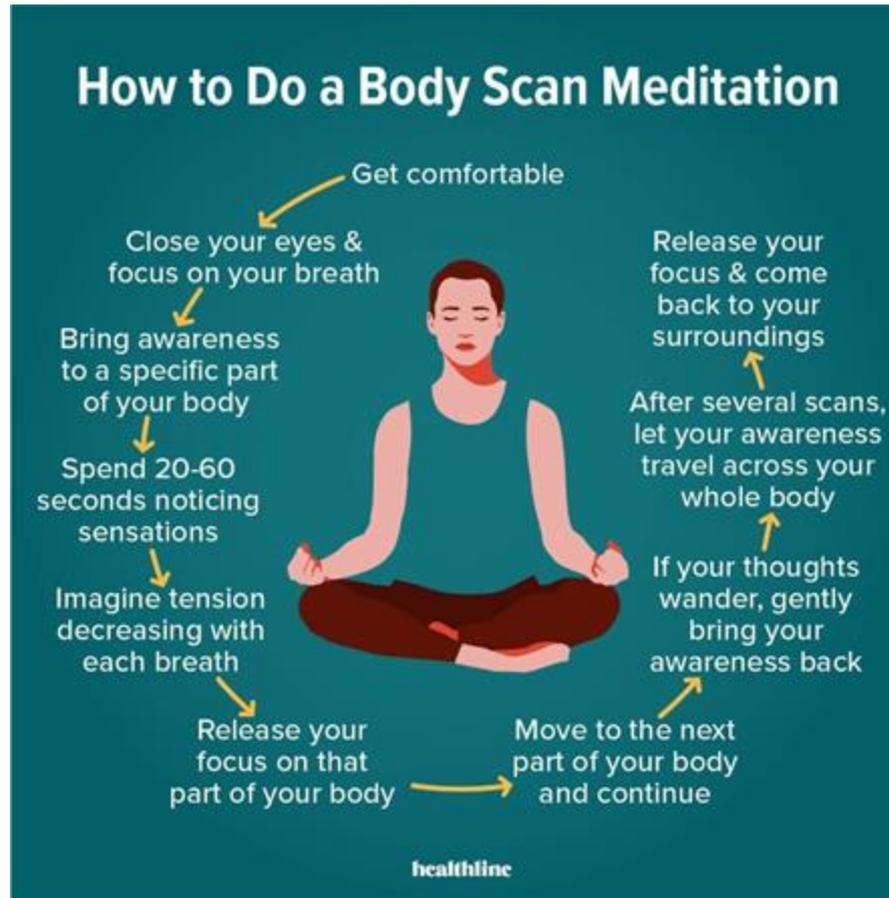
4-7-8 Breathing

- Exhale completely with a *whoosh* sound
- Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose for a mental count of **4**
- Hold your breath for a count of **7**
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound for a count of **8**
- This is one breath. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

“How to Train Your Monkey Mind”



The Body Scan Meditation



“Observe the Good”

- Pick a body part that is not in pain or is functioning as intended
- Take a few minutes to bring your awareness and attention to that body part:
 - Make observations about it
 - Then ask: How does this body part help me function? What does it allow me to do?
- Repeat daily

Pain Coping Skills Toolkit

Distraction	Sight Sound	Smell Touch
Cognitive Behavioral therapy skills	ABC Exercise ANTS Worksheet	
Acceptance and Commitment therapy skills	Values Identification Exercise	
Visualization	"Happy Place" Pain Visual "Where the focus goes the energy grows"	
Dialectical Behavior therapy skills	Radical Acceptance Distress Tolerance	
Gratitude	Everything you are grateful for	
Behavioral activation	"Do one thing" approach	
Self fulfilling prophecies	"Thoughts become things"	
Social support	Who is in my support network? Family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, healthcare providers	

Time-based activity pacing	Think about tasks in terms of <i>time</i> , not category
Laughter therapy	Endorphin production! Even if the laughter is forced ☺
Pleasant activity scheduling	More endorphins! Building joyful moments
Nature/Pets	Therapeutic qualities of animals and nature
Topical treatments	Heat, ice, massage, topical creams/gels
Positioning	Moving the body to find some relief
Exercises	Physical therapy, injury prevention, strengthens the immune system
My helpful narratives about pain	Helpful, realistic mantras I can turn to
Mindfulness	"How to train your monkey mind" Guided imagery "Observe the Good"



Mindfulness for Healthcare Workers

The Effects of Mindfulness in Healthcare Workers

- Mindfulness training leads to a better mood perception, lower stress perception, and responding to stimuli more effectively.
- Mindfulness meditation has a beneficial effect on stress, depression, burnout, well-being and empathy among doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers. (Chmielewski et al., 2021)
- Participating in an abbreviated mindfulness training course adapted for primary care clinicians was associated with reductions in indicators of job burnout, depression, anxiety, and stress. (Fortney et al., 2013)

The PACE Technique

- Permission: Consciously grant yourself permission to care for yourself.
- Awareness and Anchor: Bring your awareness to the present moment.
Notice any areas of tension or tightness in the body. Observe any physical sensations you have, along with your thoughts and thought patterns in the here and now.
- Compassion: Turn toward yourself with kindness.
- Envision: Visualize yourself stepping into the next moment with a sense of well-being, Picture yourself feeling energized and confident.

Mindfulness Resources

- Websites:

- 8-Week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program created by Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD, at UMass Memorial Medical Center: <https://www.ummhealth.org/services-treatments/center-mindfulness/mindfulness-programs/mbsr>
- Seattle Mindfulness Center: <https://www.seattlemindfulnesscenter.com/classes/group>
- The Free Mindfulness Project: <https://www.freemindfulness.org/download>

- Apps:

- Headspace
- Calm

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Referrals to Pain Psychology from within VMFH can be sent to the
DT PMR Pain Psych box in Cerner