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MINDFULNESS MATTERS

Center for Integrative Counseling and Wellness promotes achieving calm and focus in the age of technology.

We live in an age of unprecedented digital distraction. On a daily basis, we are bombarded with tweets, texts, Facebook and Instagram notifications. Add the computer games and the latest binge-worthy Netflix series, and it's a wonder how we find any time away from our screens. As entertaining as these platforms can be, the problem is that they tend to splinter our focus. Fortunately, there is a powerful antidote: the concept and practice of mindfulness. Simply put, mindfulness is the practice of putting your full attention on each moment, your feelings, sensations and surroundings.

As easy as this sounds, most people need some training to achieve it and there are a number of modalities where they can learn it: yoga, meditation, breath work and counseling. Psychologist Dr. Barbara Green, co-founder of the Center for Integrative Counseling and Wellness in Hingham often uses mindfulness techniques with her patients. "Research shows us that meditating as little as five minutes twice per day can change and improve your brain function and reduce anxiety," notes Green. "I teach my clients simple meditation techniques that they can integrate into their daily lives. I also advise that they take frequent breaks from technology. While "multitasking" is a popular buzzword, the reality is that our brains are not designed to focus on more than one thing at a time."

Written by **LAURA DESISTO**

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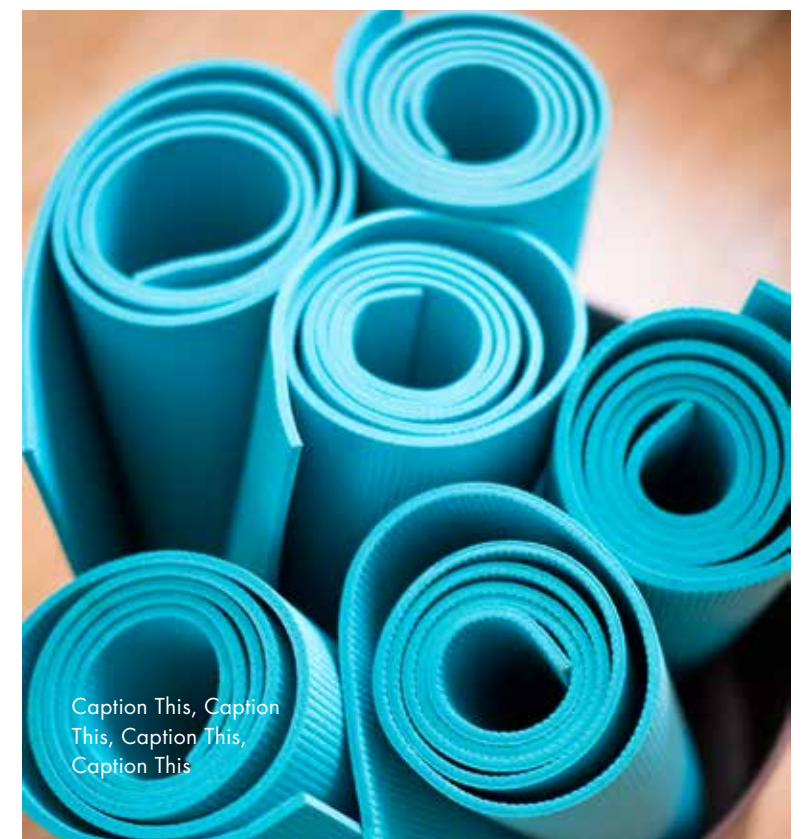
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Trish Hart is a therapeutic yoga instructor and stress management specialist who frequently teaches breath work techniques both in private sessions and in her "Just Breathe" workshops at the center to help her students achieve mindfulness and a peaceful state. "By noticing our breath, we become aware of the mind's tendency to jump from one thing to another—often referred to as our monkey mind," says Hart. "When our minds wander, we can come back to focusing on our breath and this is a simple, yet powerful way to achieve mindfulness." Learning how to take mindful breaths can lead to a relaxation response, which she explains is "a state of deep rest that improves our physical and emotional response to stress."

The practice of yoga is another tool to help bring our attention to the present moment. Yoga therapist and author Kim Dwyer who wrote "Meditations for Moms," teaches private and group yoga at the Center for Integrative Counseling and Wellness, where she encourages her students to take a "bottom-up" approach. "Deep presence and awareness does not happen with our mental thinking mind. It actually starts with our awareness of physical sensations," says Dwyer. "While in a yoga pose, we may notice a tight hip or a clenched jaw. Our goal is to just sit and notice these sensations without judgment or the urge to change them. This leads to our being able to witness our thoughts and feelings in the same non-judgmental way. Our ultimate goal is to transfer this same mindfulness to our daily lives."



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MINDFULNESS IN MINUTES

These simple and short mindfulness techniques can be easily integrated into your daily life:

Place one palm below your navel. Inhale through your nose, pressing your belly into your hand then as you exhale, draw your navel to your spine. Do this slowly several times.

When washing your hair, close your eyes and feel the massage on your scalp and smell the fragrance of the shampoo.

When driving, turn off the radio and be silent. Practice breathing at red lights.

Eat slowly, and savor the aroma and taste of your food.

In the morning, listen to the birds at dawn.

Lie on the ground and watch the clouds move across the sky.

When walking, focus on the sound of your footfalls and the sensation of the ground under your feet.

Green says the long list of research-based benefits of mindfulness is continuing to grow and includes such things as increased focus and attention span, improved sleep, decreased anxiety and stress, improved academic function, strengthened immune system and better emotional regulation. With so many benefits and ways to achieve mindfulness—from just a few minutes of breathing to an hour-long yoga class—you would think more of us would be practicing it. “The most frequent excuse I hear is, ‘I just don’t have the time,’” says Green. “But when people start living mindfully, what they actually find is that time seems to slow down and expand for them. The truth is, time is our most precious commodity. By unplugging from our screens and tuning in, we learn to appreciate the present moment and all of its gifts. To me, that seems like a worthy investment of five minutes.” **H**

