

MINDFULNESS IN THE TIME OF COVID-19
What, Why, When, Where, and How to Practice



A Guideline for Health Professionals
(And Other Interested People)

HOLISTIC AND PSYCHOSOMATIC CLINIC
Department of Psychiatry
Government Medical College, Thiruvananthapuram.

CONTENTS

1. Preface to this guideline
2. Three essential points about mindfulness to remember
3. COVID-19 and mental health
4. What is Stress?
5. Symptoms of Stress
6. Mindfulness
7. A brief history of Mindfulness in mental health
8. How does mindfulness work?
9. Body Scan Practice – An Introduction
10. A mindful way to avoid touching our face
11. For whom is mindfulness?
12. Mindfulness and stress management
13. Sub- skills of Mindfulness
14. Mindfulness and brain
15. Mindfulness and psychiatry
16. How to begin a mindfulness practice?
17. Mindfulness techniques
18. Grounding practice
19. A brief guided mindfulness meditation
20. Mindful eating
21. Mindful movements
22. Mindful Walking
23. STOP Technique
24. Mindfulness of thoughts
25. Mindfulness of emotions
26. RAIN Technique
27. Mindfulness in day-to-day activities
28. 10 minutes of silence and solitude a day
29. Loving Kindness Meditation – An Introduction
30. Loving Kindness Meditation – A Practice
31. A suggestion for daily Mindfulness practice

ABOUT THIS GUIDELINE

This guideline is intended for healthcare professionals and others who are interested to know about the role of mindfulness in the current scenario of COVID-19 pandemic. This was prepared with the help of people with more than 10-15 years of experience in the field of mindfulness.

This also aims to destigmatize and change the misconceptions in the mind of people about mindfulness.

The authors of this guideline do not directly or indirectly advise the techniques as a form of treatment for any physical or psychological diseases without the advice of a medical professional proficient in these methods.

Contributors to this book would like to emphasize – Mindfulness is not yoga or meditation. Yoga and meditation are good tools for cultivating the state of mindfulness.

Mindfully yours

Holistic and Psychosomatic Clinic

Department of Psychiatry, Government Medical College Thiruvananthapuram.

3 CRUCIAL POINTS ABOUT MINDFULNESS TO REMEMBER

Mindfulness is not meant for blissful experiences

Mindfulness is not a panacea cure

Mindfulness is not the only way to reduce stress or increase wellbeing

COVID-19 AND MENTAL HEALTH

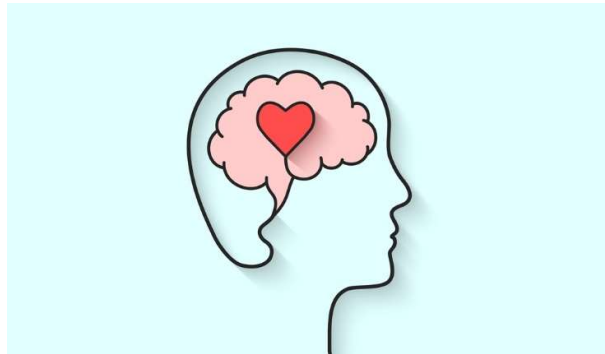
Life during COVID-19 and life after COVID-19 are entirely different from what we have experienced so far. This is a time of intense personal and social isolation for everyone. Stress, depression, anxiety and cognitive and emotional problems can surface even for those without any previously diagnosed psychiatric disorders. And for those with any psychiatric disorder, the risk, definitely is going to be very high.

Not only COVID-19, the social distancing and isolation that was imposed on the general public is a great stressor for many. The psychological issues of COVID-19 can be broadly divided into:

1. Issues due to lack of proper understanding about COVID-19
2. Issues related to social isolation and distancing
3. Issues related to post-COVID-19 situations

In addition to stress, anxiety, depression, adjustment problems, relationship issues, financial problems, unemployment, emotional dyscontrol and such are all foreseeable consequences.

Managing our mental health and psychosocial well-being during this time is as important as managing our physical health. Maintaining the physical and mental health of the



caregivers is very essential if we are to successfully manage the physical and mental health of the patients whom we care for.

Methods suggested for self-help include coping strategies such as ensuring sufficient rest, having healthy food, engagement in indoor physical activity and staying in contact with family and friends (though not by physical means). People have also been advised to avoid unhelpful coping strategies such as the use of

tobacco, alcohol or other drugs which can worsen our mental and physical wellbeing and health in the long run. Many other strategies like singing, listening to music, practicing yoga asanas, reading, watching favourite movies etc. have been suggested as a way out for both the patients and health professionals. Use of digital entertainment facilities is also favoured by many.

But one thing which we have to remember is that many of these strategies may not help in the long run. They may be simple solutions suitable for the immediate period. But what we need is a strategy which has been well studied, which has been sufficiently subjected to judicious empirical research, which can possibly raise our immunity, enhance our resilience and which is easy to learn and practice. Mindfulness, about which we are going to discuss in this booklet, is one such strategy which is also meant for post COVID-19 period.

Please remember these five strategies in the post-COVID-19 period:

1. Hear, speak and see only what is appropriate. Don't spread all the forwards and posts which you get
2. Maintain social distance; stay connected
3. Remember - All thoughts are not always facts. Thoughts are just thoughts.
4. Mindfulness – for relaxation, to increase immunity, to enhance resilience
5. **SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP** – when you cannot handle on your own.

WHAT IS STRESS?

In spite of the general dictum that the mental health professionals believe in, which accepts the universality of stress, in all human beings with live brains, there are many people who believe incorrectly that stress happens only to some “selected” unfortunate humans.

Stress refers to the changes which happen in the mind and body of an individual when exposed suddenly and / or unexpectedly to a situation or individual. This becomes more severe when the individual feels that the event or individual (stressor) poses a real danger to the integrity or life of the individual and when he / she feels that one does not have resources to cope with it.

Stress can be acute or chronic. Acute stress refers to the one which occurs suddenly. Chronic stress refers to the one which continues for a prolonged period of time. Stress can be eustress (which increases our productivity) or distress (which reduces our productivity). Stress can also be vicarious (which occurs in individuals without a direct contact with the stressor). All these forms of stress have cumulative effect.

Most of the stress result from our inability to accept reality, our inability to accept the change or due to our inability to accept the impermanence and wanting everything to be permanent as we wish and want.

Stress can have a negative influence on the major systems of the body and influence our physical and mental health. Chronic stress can even result in literal shrinkage of the brain.

SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

I. Physical symptoms

Aches and pains all over the body, indigestion, sleep disturbance, tiredness, tight neck and shoulder, and the like

II. Behavioural symptoms

Smoking, overuse of alcohol, compulsive eating, bossiness, compulsive gum chewing, and the like

III. Cognitive symptoms

Inability to think clearly, forgetfulness, memory loss, indecisiveness, constant worry, loss of sense of humour and the like

IV. Emotional symptoms

Crying, nervousness, anxiety, anger, loneliness, unhappiness for no reason, feeling powerless, overwhelming feeling of pressure and the like

V. Interpersonal symptoms

Inability to have good interpersonal relation in any situation

VI. Spiritual symptoms

Inability to find a meaning for life and the like

VII. Social symptoms

Inability to follow the social rules and regulations and the like

If you find you have symptoms relating to any two of these categories you need a stress management tool

MINDFULNESS

At least few people believe mindfulness is an imaginary exercise. Mindfulness is an awareness that we cultivate by being in the present moment. In other ways, as Jon Kabat Zinn has defined, mindfulness refers to the awareness that can be cultivated by paying attention, on purpose, with intention, to the unfolding of moment to moment experience, non-judgementally and with openness and curiosity.

Mindfulness is not an all or none phenomenon. It exists in a spectrum ranging from none to all.

Mindfulness can be cultivated or created if we pay a little bit of attention. Just attend to your thoughts, emotions and bodily sensations - what passes through you, what feelings you get and what body sensations you become aware of – is the tool which will help us to cultivate mindfulness. Let us remind you, mindfulness is not a miracle panacea cure. It is an experience that is subjective which is capable of producing objective changes.

Mindfulness is awareness. It is an awareness about what to do, why to do, where to do when to do, and how to do. It is also an awareness about what not to do, why not to do, where not to do when not to do, and how not to do.

Remember the three words which we have to remember when practicing the three pillars which can protect us from getting infected with corona - Attention, hygiene, and distancing. Most often we forget to follow these three simple steps just because we fall short of our attention and compassion. We also forget to apply the science of compassion towards ourselves and others, in our day to day life. Come - let us bring the technique, the practice and the science of compassionate attention – i.e., mindfulness into our own life and the lives of our dear and near ones.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MINDFULNESS IN MENTAL HEALTH

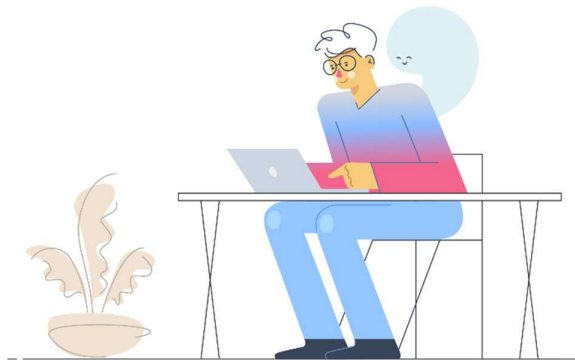
The history of modern mindfulness revolution starts from the middle years of 1970s, when Jon Kabat Zinn, a molecular biologist started a stress clinic at the Massachusetts in USA for patients with chronic pain and stress. The 8 week program which he devised and implemented later came to be known as Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). The program was found to be useful for an array of conditions like anxiety, stress, psoriasis, and was also proved to enhance immune function and resilience.

In the UK, the era of mindfulness began with the development of Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) by three psychologists – Zindel Segal, Mark Williams and John Teasdale, in an attempt to develop a form of psychotherapy which can be useful for relapse

prevention in individuals with depressive disorder. Following this a large number of psychotherapies incorporating mindfulness as one of the ingredients have been developed and they are collectively called

third wave psychotherapies. The most important among them include MBRP (Mindfulness Based Relapse Prevention), ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy), DBT (Dialectical behaviour Therapy), and MiCBT (Mindfulness Integrated Cognitive Behavior Therapy).

In India, the two programs developed based on mindfulness are from the Holistic and Psychosomatic Clinic of the Department of Psychiatry, Government Medical College, Thiruvananthapuram. They include MLM – (Mindful Life Management, a stress management program) and MUCBT – Mindfulness Unified Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, a psychotherapy format for specific psychiatric disorders.



The programs are run by the Holistic and Psychosomatic Clinic of the Department of Psychiatry, Government Medical College, Thiruvananthapuram totally free of cost and are conducted as 8-10 week program.

HOW DOES MINDFULNESS WORK?

A simple explanation for mindfulness is the ABC model. ‘A’ stands for developing **awareness**. Usually the first main formal mindfulness practice that is introduced is the body scan meditation (BSM), in which one is led through paying attention systematically to different parts of the body. Usually within moments of starting the practice, the mind gets caught up in thinking about something else.

The basic instruction is to notice when the mind wanders off and then return to the body sensations. Noticing where the mind has gone off to, one discovers in detail the habitual patterns of the mind. Returning back to the body teaches



how to step out of being caught up in mental distractions. ‘B’ is for **being with experience**. Building on the foundation of body awareness, once a person has gained some familiarity with noting the mind going off and returning back to the object of meditation (such as the body sensations), the next step is to learn to turn towards difficult experience with an attitude of acceptance. This counters the typical reactions of pushing away unwanted experience. The letter ‘C’ is for making wise **choices**. Having learnt to stay with persistent or painful experiences, one is in a better position to judge what the most helpful thing to do next is.

Learning to be with difficult thoughts or emotions is the crux of MBIs, but it can feel counterintuitive. Usually, when difficult experiences arise either they are avoided or one is sucked into them in an unhelpful way. MBIs, through turning towards difficult experience, steer away from these twin responses of ‘blocking’ or ‘drowning into thoughts and emotions’. Thoughts, feelings and body sensations are seen less as good or bad, and more as transient mental events.

A BODY SCAN PRACTICE: THE CALM REMINDER

This is a simple type of BSM. The practice can be expanded or contracted depending on the amount of time and attention one has — from just a few minutes, up to ten or fifteen minutes.

- This practice can be done in the sitting or lying down posture.
- Allow your eyes to close if you feel comfortable.
- Begin with a few expanded breaths, allowing your body to relax as you extend the out-breath.
- The acronym for the practice is CAALM - CA(Chest and Abdomen), A(Arms), L(Legs) and M (Mouth and Head).

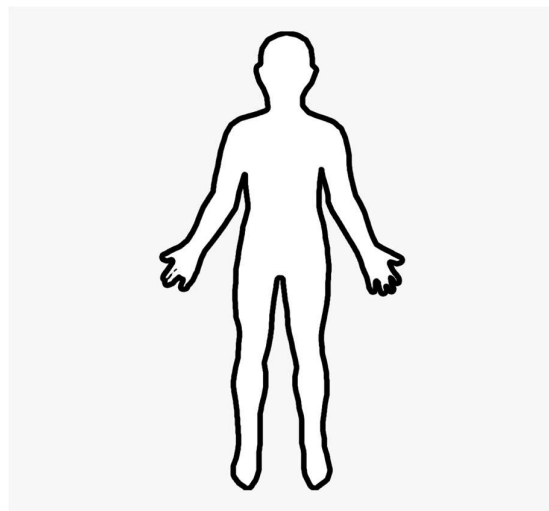
C-Chest and Abdomen

After a few breaths, bring your awareness to your **chest** and **abdomen** area. First scan your chest and abdomen with your mind. Bring your awareness to any sensations there.

Is your breath shallow and short, or slow and even? As you regulate your breath, you regulate your body and brain, and in turn your emotions, impulses, and attention. Is your heart beating fast or slow? Is there any tightness or tension in your chest or abdomen?

Allow your breath to expand your chest.

A-Arms



Shift your awareness now into your arms, from your shoulders down to your fingers. Now scan your awareness upward from your hands through the forearms and upper arms to your shoulders.

Are they moving or still? Can you just allow them to settle if they are moving? Are they tensed partly into fists? If so, just release that tension. Are your hands sweaty or clammy?

Scan up your arms to your shoulders, continuing to notice any other sensations that might give you a clue as to your emotional state.

L-Legs

On the next breath, direct your attention down to your **legs**, from your hips down through your toes, allowing your attention to flow through your thighs, calves, and feet. Often our legs can be shaking with anxiety, or tightened up by holding tension and stress. Notice if your legs are communicating anything in this moment, and just allow them to become still if they are not. Allow them to rest.

M-Mouth and Head

Lastly, shift your awareness to your **mouth** head as a whole, a place where many of us hold tension and clench our muscles without realizing it.

What expression is your mouth communicating inwardly and outwardly—stress, anxiety, anger? Notice this and any other sensations in your mouth and even the rest of your head and neck.

As you let go of the tension, allow your mouth to relax into a small smile to yourself and to the world around you. Take a few more moments to feel and be aware of the sensations of you are feeling on your head as a whole.

As you come to the end of your practice, be aware of where in your body you tend to hold emotions and tension. Take a deep breath into those areas before finishing your practice. Allow those areas to come to a natural resting state.

When you feel ready to open your eyes, open them gently.

A MINDFUL WAY TO AVOID TOUCHING OUR FACE

Mindful attention is a way we use to cultivate the quality of mindfulness. Now-a-days, all public health experts tell us emphatically not to touch our face, especially if we've been out in the world and our hands have not been recently washed or disinfected. It's one method which has been suggested to help us stay healthy and stop the viral spread. It is easy to say, but difficult to follow most of the time. For those who find it difficult not to touch the face, a couple of small tips from the world of mindfulness may help.



Two Mindful Ways to Stop Touching our Face

Don't use a negative guideline or prompt. It is better to use a positive prompt. Rather than telling let us not touch our face, a phrase like "let us keep our hands below our neck" may help more.

Practice hand meditation. Our hands are a critical aspect of how our body and mind engage the world. In these circumstances, when we are out in the world and our hands may be compromised, we may make your hands the focus of a light mindfulness practice. Instead of resting attention on the breath or our feet touching the ground, let us now rest attention on our hands. After practicing this a few times, it becomes an easy habit.

This was just an example of how mindfulness principles could be used in our day to day life in this time of COVID-19.

Try how else you can use mindfulness in other suggestions like safe social distancing.

FOR WHOM IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness is

**Not only for
the patients!**

**But also for
the
Caregivers!!!**

MINDFULNESS AND STRESS MANAGEMENT

Most of the people arrive at unscientific methods in search of methods to manage stress. Let us see what stress means from a mindfulness perspective. When we try to judge the present moment with our past moments and its memories, we develop depression. When we try to judge the present moment with our future moments and its insecurities, we develop anxiety. If we can keep away from judging our present moment with our past or future, it can be a better way to manage our stressful situations.

How does mindfulness result in stress reduction? Mindfulness reduces the autonomic arousal and helps in alleviating the peripheral signs and symptoms of stress. It helps in relaxing our muscle. Mindfulness influences the prefrontal cortex (which controls our attention and concentration) and limbic system (which helps us to experience and express our emotions) and helps to prevent the rational and wise being hijacked by our emotions (Amygdala hijack). Mindfulness has also been found to influence the chemical communications resulting in better mood and cognitions.



Mindfulness not only reduces our stress, but also improves the way in which we respond to it. Mindfulness has been shown to improve our physical and psychological immunity and enhance our resilience to stressful events.

Almost all the mindfulness techniques described in this book have both direct and indirect effects on our stress levels.

SUBSKILLS OF MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is an awareness that can be cultivated by paying attention to the present moment non-judgementally. It is a skill which can be learned through practice. For those who find this to be a little bit difficult, practicing the following sub-skills will help

1. Patience
2. Acceptance
3. Non-judgmental attitude
4. Let go
5. Beginner's mind
6. Non-striving
7. Trust
8. Openness
9. Curiosity
10. Compassion

Practicing these sub- skills will help in cultivation of mindfulness. The interesting fact is that when you practice these sub- skills, what you get is mindfulness.

MINDFULNESS AND BRAIN

It won't be wrong if we call the modern man a brain-phenomenon. Contrary to popular belief the brain continues to change throughout our life. The changes that happen to our brain cells in response to our experiences is called neuroplasticity.

Neuroplasticity works in the same way as the other body processes. When we exercise it results in our muscles getting developed. When we exercise the qualities of attention, empathy, happiness, the respective brain parts also undergo changes. This perhaps will change



the knowledge relating to brain which we have been carrying for centuries.

The major changes which mindfulness practice produces in the brain are the following:

1. Increases cortical thickness
2. Enhances neuroplasticity
3. Increases attention and concentration
4. Increases emotional regulation
5. Increases activation of mirror neurons

Given the fact that none of the methods other than mindfulness, have undergone such extensive studies, mindfulness seems to be a better option to produce and maintain a favourable effect. Mindfulness, also is easy to learn, practice and teach.

MINDFULNESS AND PSYCHIATRY



Mindfulness researches support the role of mindfulness in several areas of mental health such as stress reduction, emotional regulation, attention regulation, and reduced rumination. Mindfulness has been found to be effective for reducing mild to moderate depression, anxiety and also for preventing relapse of depression. Mindfulness based interventions have been found to be useful in individuals struggling with addictions like alcohol and heavy smoking. Mindfulness does have a role in individuals with psychosomatic disorder, bipolar disorder and borderline personality disorder. These have emphasized the role of mindfulness or mindfulness associated psychotherapies as an add-on treatment for many psychiatric disorders.

The role of mindfulness as a preventive method or as an independent treatment modality is being studied independently by various researchers.

HOW TO BEGIN A MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

1. Choose a posture – one that is comfortable for you.
2. Pay attention to the body (as we learn in the body scan practice)
3. Begin to feel the sensations of the breath
4. Notice when the attention wanders – remember that wandering is a natural tendency of the mind
5. Identify your judgements, if any.

Remember that mindfulness is not about achieving a particular kind of bliss or experience, rather it's about being aware of what is happening when it is happening.



MINDFULNESS TECHNIQUES

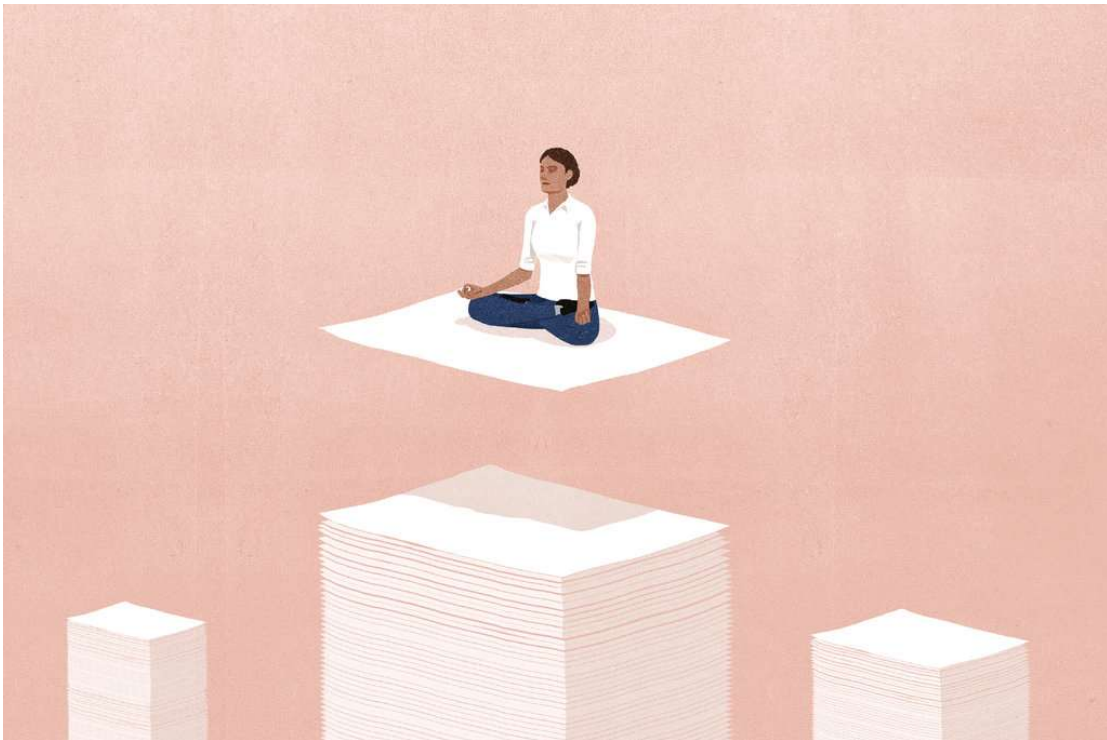
Mindfulness techniques can broadly be divided into two:

Formal mindfulness techniques

These are structured practices. Formal mindfulness practices include guided and unguided mindfulness meditation, body scan meditation, mindful eating, mindful walking, mindful yoga or stretching, thought awareness, loving kindness practice and the like.

Informal mindfulness techniques

These are unstructured practices, which one can practice at one's own pace. Informal mindfulness may be as simple as being "in the zone" while exercising, being fully present while brushing teeth, chopping vegetables, washing the car, completing a task at work... or listening to another person fully and completely, without planning what to say next or whether what they are saying rings true for you or not.



GROUNDING

Grounding, is a technique which will help us to have a stable posture. The following are the steps which will help familiarise with the grounding exercise.

1. Sit comfortably. Be it on a chair, bench or floor. Watch yourself.

Are you comfortable? Gently close your eyes.

2. Attend to all the sounds that you can hear for few moments

3. Attend to your body parts which touch the chair or the ground for few moments.

4. Attend to your body parts which touch each other for few moments.

5. Attend to your breathing for few moments. Allow the breath to flow in and out of your nostrils smoothly.

8. Take a deep breath and leave it out completely.

9. Open your eyes slowly.

Grounding is the basic exercise to practice mindfulness for anyone. It will tell us when we are not mindful. That itself is a moment of mindfulness.

A BRIEF GUIDED MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

You can also attend to the following...



Given below is a script for a 5-minute guided mindfulness meditation. This can be extended to 10 or 15 minutes. Maximum time recommended is 20 minutes.

1. Sit comfortably. Close your eyes.
2. Take a deep breath and leave it out (15 sec).
3. Attend to the abdomen which moves in and out with the breathing (45 sec).
4. Attend to the body sensations which you can feel for a few moments (75 sec).
5. Making no judgements, try sitting with attending to your experiences of this moment.
6. Now, sit for a few moments attending to your normal breathing (120 sec).
7. Bring your attention back to your abdomen which moves in and out with the breathing (30 sec).
8. Take a breath deeply and leave it out completely (15 sec).
9. Open your eyes gently

The time as indicated within the brackets need not be considered a dictum.



MINDFUL EATING

1. Mindful eating is not about eating slowly.

Mindful Eating is:

2. Allowing yourself to become aware of the positive and nurturing opportunities and use them in food selection and preparation.
3. Using all your senses in choosing to eat food.
4. Acknowledging responses to food (likes, dislikes, or neutral) without judgment.
5. Becoming aware of physical hunger and satiety cues to guide your decisions to begin and end eating.

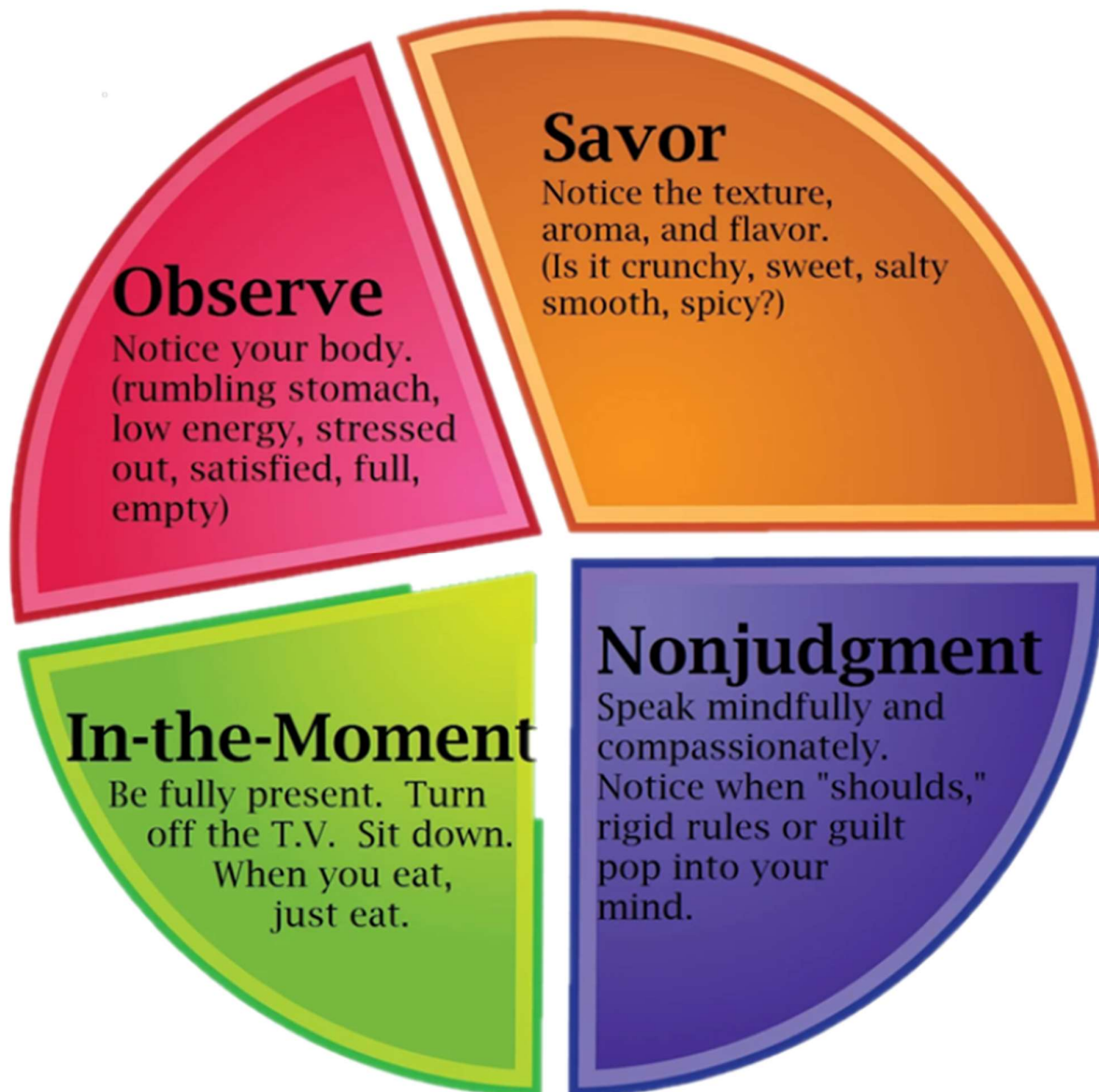
Someone Who Eats Mindfully:

6. Acknowledges that there is no right or wrong way to eat.
7. Accepts that their eating experiences are unique.
8. Is an individual who by choice, directs their attention to eating on a moment-by-moment basis.
9. Gains awareness of how they can make choices that support health and well-being.
10. Becomes aware of the interconnection of earth, living beings, and cultural practices, and the impact of their food choices on those systems.

Before one eats anything, one can think about how this food or choice of food will help them, allowing to become aware of the positive and nurturing opportunities that are available through food selection and preparation by respecting one's own inner wisdom.

While eating mindfully

1. See the food
2. Touch the food
3. Hear the food
4. Smell the food
5. Taste the food



MINDFUL MOVEMENTS

Mindful movements are another way of cultivating mindfulness. Those who are not able to attend to their breath, can attend to the movements which they make in day-to-day life to cultivate mindfulness. During the 21 day 'Lockout period' we will find that the exercises and other movements which we were having once will get reduced. Mindful movements are a way of stabilizing our body and mind, synchronising our breath and movement, and to get energized all over. Movement, here, becomes the anchor of our practice.

Though formally mindful movements have to be learned from a class directly, I advise you to be mindful of any movement that you are comfortable with. During the movements:

1. Attend to the body part that is moving
2. Attend to your breath
3. Synchronise your breathing with the movement.

Synchronising breathing with the movement means arranging the breath and body movements in a particular way as given below:

“Whenever the body part moves upwards, backwards or sideways, take a breath in”.

Move all the joints of the body in all the possible directions.

Mindful movements help us to hear what the body wants to tell us. It also helps in better becoming aware of and controlling our emotion in a more desirable way.



MINDFUL WALKING

Research has suggested that mindfulness meditation reduces stress, snacks depression and stress as effectively as antidepressant medications, increases sleep and storage, increases persistence, eases pain, makes love-making more fun, and increases overall well-being. Mindful walking, otherwise called walking meditation is different from sitting meditation in the sense that you utilise your walking as the key focus, which is an important motion to help you become more alert to your body.

In walking meditation, make an effort to refrain from chatting, to be able to maintain knowing of your breathing also to be familiar with the steps that you take.



Mindful walking can be practiced while you walk informally or formally. Informal mindful walking can simply be practiced in several ways While you walk, just attend to the pressure

1. You feel on the under surface of your sole of your feet.
2. While you are walking attend to the breath at the tip of the nose.

Formal mindful walking can be done within the four walls of our home or within a limited space.

1. Stand up direct with your backside upright however, not stiff.
2. Let your hands fall on either sides of your body.
3. Drop your gaze just a bit.
4. Start walking by moving a leg and opposite arm.
5. Feel the feet and arm moving

6. Observe the following sensations on your leg

1. The pressure the foot feels on the ground
2. The movements of the feet upwards
3. The movement of the feet forwards
4. The movement of the foot downwards
5. The pressure you feel when the feet touch the ground

In either case, your mind has a tendency to get distracted. If you get distracted just return to the point of your attention compassionately.

There is absolutely no "right" or "wrong" experience. Just experience how it seems to you.

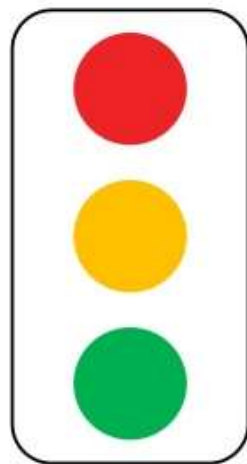
STOP TECHNIQUE

The year of COVID-19, is the year of emotional distress and disturbance. In a way, we can say, this is a period when our emotional intelligence will be put to test. The way in which we feel the emotions, the way in which we experience the emotions, and the way in which we express and share the emotions will be put to test.

One of the easiest ways that we know of, in being with anxiety (or any emotion) is the STOP technique. STOP stands for

1. Sit comfortably
2. Take a breath and leave it out
3. Observe the process
4. Proceed for 5-20 minutes

If you want to start practicing mindfulness, start it NOW with the STOP technique. Here is how we make it more simple.



Sit comfortably

Observe your breath

Stop when you want to stop.

That's all.

MINDFULNESS OF THOUGHTS

Mindfulness refers to the awareness cultivated by paying attention, on purpose, intentionally to the unfolding of moment to moment experience, non-judgementally with openness and curiosity. This attention usually involves five anchors – breath, body, thoughts, emotions and environment. Managing stress means learning a skill to gain an insight between the interconnectedness of thoughts, emotions and body sensations.

Thoughts refers to everything that we can express as letters, pictures, words or images. We can say that thoughts represent the interactions which neurotransmitters in the brain undergo. There are certain things which we should know about thoughts:

1. Thoughts are always present. Mostly we don't attend to them.
2. Thoughts are generally divided into positive and negative. What we like, we call positive. What we don't like, we call negative.
3. At times thoughts seem to come spontaneously. At times they come from internal or external stimuli. But every thoughts comes from the brain.
4. At times some thoughts may recur again and again for no logical reason. This we call rumination. Such thoughts give rise to secondary and tertiary thoughts.
5. We don't usually pay attention when these thoughts are positive. But when they are negative, such rumination can result in depressive disorders and relapse of depressive episodes.
6. Most of these thoughts may not be real facts. They may be our presumptions or assumptions
7. All thoughts are not always facts. Thoughts are just mental events.
8. But thoughts can influence our physical and mental health positively and negatively. Most of the psychosomatic disorders like bronchial asthma, diabetes mellitus, hypertension and such are examples of this.

9. In the resting state our mind keeps wandering. This wandering is responsible for our unhappiness and stress.
10. Mind can create stories out of the thoughts.
11. The stories are created in such a way that one is forced to believe that they are real.
12. Mind will, then, cling to such stories.

Managing the difficult thoughts needs changing the relationship with them or altering the way in which we address them. Try these three simple approaches and see if you can work on changing your relationship with certain patterns of thinking.

MINDFULNESS OF EMOTIONS

COVID-19 and the period after are and will be periods of intense emotions.

Mindfulness can be cultivated by paying attention non-judgementally to our breath, body, thoughts, emotions and surroundings. But most of the difficult moments of life cannot be effectively managed by remaining



unmindful of our emotions. Being mindful of emotion does not mean that we don't feel the emotion or we deny its existence. Being mindful of emotions helps us to step back from the emotion, understand it, accept it, not to fear it or struggle against it. This can help to reduce the distress which we experience.

Every emotion has three components – a feeling, a thought and a body sensation. All these three are linked. A feeling may have an underlying thought. A thought may have either a feeling or body sensation beneath it. And a body sensation might have a thought beneath it. By observing these three, we can learn to manage our emotions.

This is a technique which can easily be learned by few moments of practice. Set aside a few minutes when you can be quiet and undisturbed.

Start by bringing your attention to your breath. Notice your breathing as you slowly breathe in and out, noticing the sensations in your belly as it moves in and out. And then start to observe the feelings.

Now *name the emotion*. What is it? (Is it anger, sadness, anxiety, irritation, fear, frustration?). *Accept that the emotion, which you feel is a normal body reaction.*

It can be helpful to understand how it came about. What were the set of circumstances that contributed to you feeling this way? Do not judge the emotion. Simply let it move through you *without resisting it, struggling against it, or encouraging it*. How intensely do you feel it? How are you breathing? What are you feeling in your body? Where do you feel it? What is your posture like when you feel this emotion? Where do you notice muscle tension? What is your facial expression? What does your face feel like? Is anything changing? (Nature, position, intensity) What thoughts or judgements do you notice? Just notice those thoughts. *Allow them to come into your mind, and allow them to pass. If at any time you find that your mind is engaging with the thoughts, by judging them or by judging yourself for having them, believing them, struggling against them: just notice, and bring your attention back to your breathing, and to the physical sensations of the emotion.* If any other emotions come up, if anything changes, simply notice and repeat the steps above. *Just notice that the feelings change over time.*

As you become more practised, you can use this mindfulness technique when you feel more intense emotion.

THE RAIN TECHNIQUE

Rain technique is a practice usually used by mindfulness practitioners to deal with difficult moments in life. Emotional pain from self-criticism, anxiety, depression, worry, and other negative mental habits is common to all of us. Not that these emotions aren't useful; like all emotions, they have their place as possible signals that something is wrong (or right). But in excess, these emotions are simply overwhelming and do us no good. Remember, we cannot have a life without emotions.



When you are in a situation when your negative thinking habits are making you suffer, consider trying the "RAIN" technique to soften and re-channel these harmful patterns. Mindfulness therapists often use this technique to bring mindful awareness to emotional distress and provide a soothing balm for emotional pain.

Here are the basic steps of the RAIN practice

1. R = Recognize. Recognize the emotions or thoughts that are troubling you. Notice them without judgment. Naming them can also help shrink them to manageable size.
2. A = Acknowledge, Accept, Allow. The next step is to acknowledge your distress and accept it as your present reality. Accepting the pattern does not mean you like it; it only means that you are able to put these

unpleasant mental contents front and observe, rather than allowing them to stream unconsciously under the surface of your mind. One can always come back to breathe till such a compassionate observation may be practiced.

3. I = Inquire, Investigate. At this stage of the process, you can use your natural curiosity to delve more deeply into your distress. You can ask yourself: What triggered this current bout of distress? When have I felt this way before? What thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations are connected to these feelings? How realistic is my thinking? Are there actions I could take to help myself or another person? What do I need?
4. N = Non-identification. Your painful thoughts, feelings, and sensations are not *you*. Instead of identifying with them, you can mentally "step to the side" and watch them pass by like vehicles on the road.

Some authors have added a fifth letter S to the RAIN practice making it RAINS. S stands for self-compassion.

- S = Self-compassion. Self-compassion means offering yourself some friendliness, generosity, and sympathy. It is not self-pity; rather, it is a recognition and acceptance of your humanness, your imperfection, and your suffering. It is empathizing with yourself the way you might for your best friend or love partner. Instead of resisting our feelings of fear or grief, we embrace our pain with the kindness of a mother holding her child."

The RAINS technique is not a panacea and doesn't work for everyone or in every situation.

MINDFULNESS IN DAY-TO-DAY ACTIVITIES

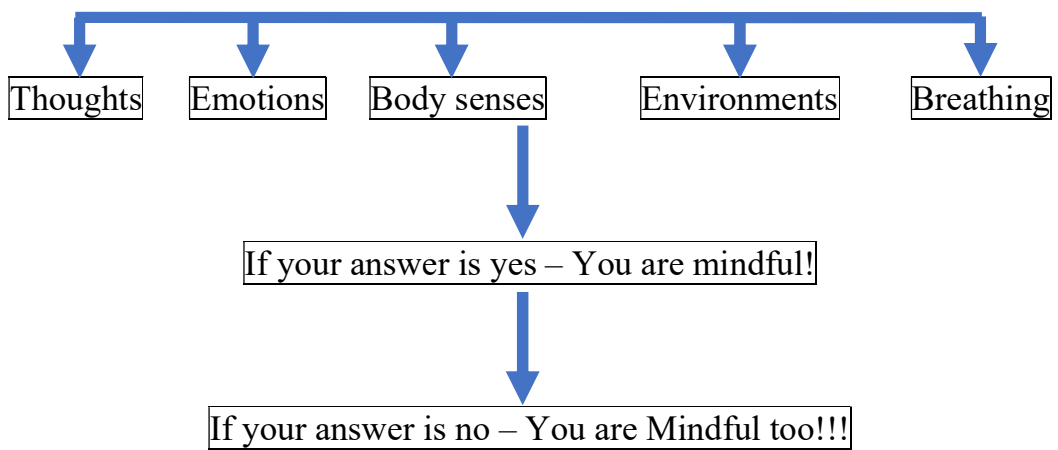
Mindfulness is an art and science of attending compassionately to our present moment as it unfolds.

Here are a few ways in which mindfulness can be brought to our daily life.

1. When you wake up in the morning before you get out of bed, bring your attention to your breathing. Observe 5 breaths mindfully.
2. When you move from lying down to sitting to standing to walking, be aware of how your body and mind feels. Notice each time when you make a change of posture whenever possible
3. Whenever you hear an unexpected sound, observe your breath for a couple of times.
4. Thorough out the day, observe your breath 5 times every waking hour.
5. Whenever you eat, look at your food and just realize how the food has reached you.
6. Whenever you walk or stand, observed your body mindfully.
7. Try to listen mindfully and talk mindfully. Listen not just with the intention of replying. Speak not just for the sake of speaking.
8. Whenever you wait somewhere try to notice your breath, try to feel your feet on the floor. Try to feel the rise and fall of your abdomen with breathing.
9. Bring mindfulness to each and every activity of yours, whenever possible.
10. Bring mindfulness to each and every activity of yours, whenever possible.
11. Before you go to sleep at night, take a few minutes to bring your compassionate attention to your breathing.

Just ask yourself?

Are you mindful of your



10 MINUTES OF SILENCE AND SOLITUDE PER DAY – CAN WE HANDLE IT?

Can we handle just 5 minutes a day of solitude and silence? If this query was raised a few months back, many people might have thought it to be an unwanted question in the 21st century. But recently, with the implementation of the lockdown, many people than we can think about found that they cannot handle even 5 minutes of being alone.

Many mindfulness programs have one day of silent retreat as its part. A large number of people have opined that when they attended the silent retreats, they found it a waste of time. And few have also commented in favour of the silent retreat. The current scenario tells us that solitude is something we should be prepared to have in the future. Science tells us that spending time in solitude is a healthy practice. It helps us to be more aware – more aware of our thoughts, emotions and body sensations.

Today we know that the pace at which we live our lives and the way in which we try to pay attention to are major strategies to deal with our stress, anxiety, depression, and addictive behaviours. Spending time in solitude is not only a mindful act, but also a self-compassionate act. It gives us an opportunity to listen to our thoughts, our emotions and our body sensations. Thus we are exposed to an opportunity to experience our living moments in full attire. Just go through the challenges as given below:

Day	Challenge
1	5 minutes of silence and solitude
2	10 minutes of silence and solitude
3	15 minutes of silence and solitude
4	20 minutes of silence and solitude

LOVING KINDNESS MEDITATION – AN INTRODUCTION

Loving Kindness Meditation (LKM) is a practice where we actively cultivate some positive emotional states towards others, as well as to ourselves. It helps us to bring more synchronization into our relationships with our own self and others, so that we experience less conflicts, resolve existing difficulties, and deepen our connections with people we already get on with. This practice helps us to overcome negative emotions like sadness, anger, resentment, guilt and hurt.

It helps us to empathize more, and to be more considerate, kind, and forgiving. We can also learn to appreciate others more, concentrating more on their positive qualities and less on their faults. Practice of LKM lets us be more patient.

In LKM, we cultivate love and kindness towards ourselves, so that we experience less internal conflict, and learn to appreciate ourselves more. This is a particularly important aspect of the practice. LKM helps us to manage the undercurrent of negative self-

talk, which most of us have.

Loving kindness practice helps us to feel more positive, be more accepting,

kind, and patient toward ourselves, in order that we can be more compassionate and loving toward others.



Given the fact that majority of us carry negative emotions, the role of LKM in generating and maintaining positive emotions needs to be attended to.

LOVING KINDNESS MEDITATION

LKM has been reported to generate and maintain positive emotions. Here is a simple technique of LKM. Remember that it is better to practice LKM when someone has practiced breath awareness or body scan practice at least for a month. Sit comfortably. Close your eyes. It is better to keep your eyes closed throughout the session. Without straining or concentrating, just relax and gently follow the instructions.

Take a deep breath in. And leave the breath out completely. For a few moments bring your attention to your body parts which touch the ground or chair.

Keeping your eyes closed, think of a person who loves you very much. It could be someone from the past or the present; someone still in life or who has passed away; it could be a spiritual teacher or guide too. Think about that person standing on your right side, sending you their love. That person is sending you wishes for your safety, for your well-being and happiness. Feel the warm wishes and love coming from that person towards you.

Now bring to mind the same person or another person who cherishes you deeply. Imagine that person standing on your left side, sending you wishes for your wellness, for your health and happiness. Feel the kindness and warmth coming to you from that person.

Now imagine that you are surrounded on all sides by all the people who love you and have loved you. Picture all of your friends and loved ones surrounding you. They are standing around you sending you wishes for your happiness, well-being, and health. Accept the warm wishes and love coming from all sides. You are filled, and overflowing with warmth and love.

Now bring your awareness back to the person standing on your right side. Begin to send the love that you feel back to that person. You and this person are similar. Just like you, this person wishes to be happy. Send all your love and warm wishes to that person.

Repeat the following phrases, silently:

May you be happy; may you be healthy; may you be free from all internal and external sufferings.

Now focus your awareness on the person standing on your left side. Begin to direct the love within you to that person. Send all your love and warmth to that person. That person and you are alike. Just like you, that person wishes to have a good life.

Repeat the following phrases, silently:

May you be happy; may you be healthy; may you be free from all internal and external sufferings.

Now picture another person that you love, perhaps a relative or a friend. This person, like you, wishes to have a happy life. Send warm wishes to that person.

Repeat the following phrases, silently:

May you be happy; may you be healthy; may you be free from all internal and external sufferings.

Now think of a person, someone you don't know very well and toward whom you do not have any particular feeling. You and this person are alike in your wish to have a good life.

Send all your wishes for well-being to that person, repeating the following phrases, silently:

May you be happy; may you be healthy; may you be free from all internal and external sufferings.

Now bring to mind another acquaintance toward whom you feel neutral. It could be a neighbour, or a colleague, or someone else that you see around but do not know very well. Like you, this person wishes to experience joy and well-being in his or her life.



Send all your good wishes to that person, repeating the following phrases, silently:

May you be happy; may you be healthy; may you be free from all internal and external sufferings.

Now expand your awareness and picture the whole universe in front of you as a little ball. Send warm wishes to all living beings on the globe, who, like you, want to be happy:

Just as I wish to, May the whole world be happy.

Just as I wish to, may the whole world be healthy.

Just as I wish to, may the whole world be free from all internal and external sufferings.

Just attend to your breathing for a few moments. Take a deep breath in and leave the breath out completely. Notice the state of your mind and how you feel after this meditation. When you're ready, gently open your eyes.

A SUGGESTION FOR MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

Guided Mindfulness Meditation or STOP practice	-	15 minutes per Day
Mindful walking	-	150 steps per Day
Mindful eating	-	A bolus of food
Mindful movements	-	10 minutes per Day
Total time		30 minutes/day

FOR FURTHER READING

1. Nhat Hanh & Mobi Ho. *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation*. Beacon Press, 2016.
2. Kabat-Zinn, Jon. *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*. Hachette Books, 2005.
3. Sivasubramoney K, Lekshmy K. *Alanju Thiriyatha Manasu: Mindfulness inu oru Aamukham*. Prism Books. 2019.
4. Kabat Zinn, Jon. *Mindfulness for All: The Wisdom to Transform the World*. Hachette Books, 2019.
5. Andy Puddicombe. *The Headspace Guide to Meditation and Mindfulness: How Mindfulness can Change your Life in Ten Minutes a day*. St. Martin's Press. 2016.

We take this opportunity to express our
Thanks and Gratitude for your kindness to go through this guide.

Thank you for your willingness to go through what we have prepared.

Gratitude for your willingness to go through an important scientific concept

Your suggestions may be forwarded to

9447123789

kriyalak2015@gmail.com

**Those who use this booklet in part or full for distribution should
acknowledge the name of the institution given below:**



HOLISTIC AND PSYCHOSOMATIC CLINIC
Department of Psychiatry
Government Medical College, Thiruvananthapuram.