



Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

Brief History, Components and Protocol

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MBSR by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn is adapted from an ancient meditation practice called Vipassana (Insight) meditation. Both meditation practices involve consciously and intentionally being aware of unfolding sensory experiences as they occur in the present moment. In Buddhist psychology as well as MBSR mental phenomenon such as thinking, daydreams and self-talk are considered sensory as they can be observed and experienced.¹

Please note: all sensory input, including random thoughts are part of the meditation experience. This meditation practice is not goal-oriented (e.g., a completely quiet mind, a completely blissful, relaxed state); it is about being aware of and attending to what is happening in mind, body and environment as it is happening. The instructions are to simply observe and experience these events while remaining acutely aware of our unintentional involvement in such things as mental commentary and internal chatter about our likes and dislikes.

Suggestions for practice:

- *When beginning, choose only one meditative focus (e.g., the breath, or the body) and stick with it for the duration of the practice session.*
- *Guided meditations are to be actively participated in rather than merely listened to.*

MBSR Instructions

1. Set aside time for yourself: especially a time when you won't be interrupted (turn off pager, cell phone).
2. Posture: if sitting, sit tall, both feet on floor, head held high—relaxed yet alert. If lying down, legs and arms uncrossed. While awareness of the body is important, it is our awareness that is being cultivated—not a posture.
3. When practicing, it is normal and natural for your mind to wander. This is expected. However, when the mind wanders and you notice it has, very gently and without judgment identify it as “thinking”. Then recommit and kindly redirect your attention to the object of your meditation (e.g., the flow of the breath).

¹ For more information see: http://www.age-of-the-sage.org/buddhism/buddhist_philosophy.html

MBSR Formal Practice:

1. *Sitting meditation:* can be done using various meditative objects (see a-f below).

Please note: as MBSR is not a goal oriented meditation practice: one meditation object is not "better" than the other.

- a. A focus on the body just sitting
 - b. A focus on the body just breathing
 - c. A focus on the sounds
 - d. A focus on sights
 - e. A focus on thoughts
 - f. A focus on "choice-less attention" (all that is happening in body, mind and environment is held in non-judgmental awareness and fully experienced without commentary).
2. *Body Scan:* in this practice we move our awareness to various parts of the body (e.g., toes of left foot then, the sole of the left foot, the calf and so on....)
 3. *Yoga:* to assist with fitness levels and to cultivate mind/body awareness as the body is either held or is moved through a specific sequence of asanas (poses/postures).
 4. *Walking Meditation:* exaggeratedly slow walking, paying attention to the subtle nuances of walking (e.g., placing the feet, lifting the feet) gently redirecting the mind when it has wandered from the real-time experience of walking.
 5. *Silent Retreat (usually 36 or more hours):* no technology (e.g. mp3 players, phones, pagers, computers), no reading or writing, no shopping, no talking, no eye contact. Just you and the observation of sensory and experiential phenomena.

Informal Practice (examples include)

1. mindful eating
2. mindful showering
3. mindful talking
4. mindful standing and waiting (e.g., on line or for a train)

MBSR protocol requires that participants of the MBSR clinic practice all aspects that have been briefly outlined above.

For more information see: <http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/index.aspx>