What is mindfulness?

Calm observation & awareness of our present-moment experience

(physical sensations + thoughts + emotions)

- Origins in Buddhist meditation (2,560 years old)
- Can be extracted from its roots as a non-religious system of mental training
- Both a state and a trait

“... an antidote against common forms of psychological distress such as rumination, anxiety, worry, fear, and anger ...” (Keng et al, 2011)
Vipassana

From the Pali language (contemporary with Sanskrit)

- “vi” = clear, deep
- “passana” = seeing, vision, perception

\[ \text{VI} + \text{PASSANA} = \]

- Clear seeing
- Deep perception
- Seeing things as they really are
- Insight
Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D.

- 1979: Stress Reduction Clinic at University of Massachusetts Medical Center
- Chronically ill patients: pain; anxiety; depression
- Established Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society at UMass Medical School
- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

“Paying attention -- on purpose, in the present moment, nonjudgmentally”
40 YEARS OF CLINICAL TRIALS

- **Physical** (chronic pain, cardiac rehab, IBS, psoriasis, fibromyalgia, arthritis, hypertension, lung cancer, breast cancer, prostate cancer)

- **Psychoemotional** (ADHD, anxiety/depression, substance abuse/addictions, smoking cessation, insomnia, PTSD, trichotillomania, borderline personality disorder, bipolar disorder, eating disorders, panic disorder)

- **Populations** (child abuse survivors, veterans, prison inmates, elementary school students, teachers, problem gamblers, refugees, adolescent psychiatric outpatients)
Benefits of mindfulness

- **Non-invasive; no side effects; low/no cost**
- **Stationary (no physical barriers)**
- **Fosters internal peace & well-being**
- **Helps create equanimity and acceptance**
- **Empowering (take charge of your own mental health)**
- **A universal human practice (all ages, genders, religions, physical abilities, ethnicities, cultural backgrounds)**
The 21st-century brain

- Multitasking
- Fragmented focus
- Overstimulated by social media
- Sleep-deprived
- Fueled by CATS
The mindful brain

- Alert yet calm
- Focused on the present
- Emotionally regulated
- Less reactive, more responsive
- More empathetic/compassionate

(YouTube: Sara Lazar’s TEDx talk, “How Meditation Can Reshape Our Brains”)
Mental skills we can learn through mindfulness

- "Sit" with difficult emotions
  (label, observe, accept)
- Short-circuit anxious, repetitive
  "thought loops" (rumination)
- Detach from depressive thought patterns
  (challenge validity of negative cognitions)
Mindfulness and critical thinking

- Clarity
- Focus + sustained attention
- Discernment
- Non-automatic
- Non-judgmental
- Non-reactive

“... dispositional mindfulness appears to facilitate CT performance ...”

(Noone et al, 2016)
Mindfulness practice #1
Mindfulness practice #2
Mindfulness practice #3
"The key to meditation is learning to stay."
References


