

While the phrase “Be Here Now” is familiar to anyone who survived the sixties and young people unearthing the term for the first time, studies funded by the National Institute of Health, among others, have determined that mindful attention to the present moment may be the antidote to many of the physical, mental and emotional ailments created by our hectic, multi-tasking lives.

Simple as it sounds, “being here now” is unnatural for most of us, most of the time. Recollect a recent car trip. Chances are that while driving, you were thinking about something that just happened, or planning for what was to come at your destination. Accompany this with eating, talking on the phone, or God forbid, texting....how much of your attention was actually focused on driving your car? Far from being here now, much of our day is spent re-living and re-feeling what has gone before, or pre-living future situations and rehearsing for problems which may never even manifest. What happens to the now? It passes by. And yet, your heart may be racing, your blood pressure and cortisol (stress hormone) elevated, simply because your physical body and your emotional brain may not have recognized the now.. and instead responded to your imaginary future or remembered past.

Besides the fact that it might be nicer, healthier, (and sometimes, safer) to spend more of our time actually experiencing our lives as they happen, and not in retrospect or preview, eye-opening neuroscientific studies show that “being here now” through mindfulness practices can significantly change your brain, for the better. Mindfulness training has been shown to reduce activity in the amygdala, a region of the brain that determines how much stress we experience, and is central in our fight/flight/freeze response. In fact, a published study from Massachusetts General Hospital on overstressed business people showed that after eight weeks of mindfulness meditation training, the size of the amygdala actually shrunk compared to those who were not practicing mindfulness. In those eight weeks, subjects were able to change their brain and, consequently, reduce their stress.

Several studies show that mindfulness practices improve prefrontal cortex (PFC) functioning, regulating emotions and improving attention span. Another study revealed that mindfulness increased activity in the anterior cingulate cortex, a part of the brain correlated with empathy and decision-making. As these regions show more activation, subjects tend to report greater emotional stability and less reactivity.

Your Brain on Mindfulness: Why “Being Here Now” is Good for Your Health!

By Audrey Walzer, CYC Yoga Teacher; Owner & Director



Neuroscientific research has found that mindfulness meditation changes our brain so that we experience ourselves in the world from a happier, calmer place. The evidence is in: regular mindfulness practice is like taking your brain to the gym to strengthen and enhance itself. And there’s more: Clinical studies of regular people like you and me, practicing non-religious mindfulness meditation on a regular basis show not only enhanced brain function, but reduced stress levels, improved immune systems, sleep patterns, cardiovascular and gastrointestinal health among other wellness markers.

Mindfulness practice is about attending to the present moment. It teaches us to notice how the body feels, how our breathing is, right now. Far from “emptying our brain,” mindfulness is a user friendly science experiment that helps us observe our thought processes without reacting or judging. By definition, mindfulness moves us out of how our life should be and into how life actually is, moment to moment, so that we can live the lives we have, and live them as though they really matter.

Try this simple Mindful Moment: Before you dive into your next meal, take three slow intentional breaths. Feel the weight of your body resting on your chair. Notice the colors and textures of the food in front of you. Take a moment to be grateful. Then, see how your food tastes, and how you feel eating it! Paying attention is the beginning of mindfulness, and it’s available to us in every moment. *Reprinted from Camarillo Life Magazine*



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Audrey Walzer was voted “Ventura County’s Best” Yoga Teacher in 2011, 2012 & 2013 in the Ventura County Reporter Reader’s Poll. She is the owner and director of Camarillo Yoga Center, (Voted “Best Yoga Studio 2012 & 2013) and director of the Yoga@Work program. Her DVD “Easy Yoga Stretches for Home, Office & Travel” can be found online at www.easyyogastretches.net.