

Mindfulness for Addiction Manual



Hope Rehab Thailand

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Lesson One - Introduction to Mindfulness

The program here at Hope Rehab is designed to give you a solid foundation for a life free of alcohol or drugs. Our holistic approach is made up of four pillars - 12-step work, cognitive-behavioral therapy, health & fitness, and mindfulness. You may find that during your stay with us that you will develop a preference for certain pillars, this is fine, but it is when these pillars are used together that you will gain the strongest foundation for your new life.

“I fell into addiction while trying to escape mental discomfort created by unpleasant emotions and negative thinking. I needed something to help me cope with life, and self-medication with alcohol and drugs worked in the beginning. The only problem was that over time, the cost of this escape from discomfort became too high and addiction only increased my inner turmoil. Mindfulness gave me a new more effective way to deal with unpleasant emotions and negative thinking, so I no longer needed to get drunk or high.”

Paul G.

What is Mindfulness?

"Mindfulness is a particular attitude towards experience, or way of relating to life, that holds the promise of both alleviating our suffering and making our lives rich and meaningful"

Ronald D. Siegel (The Mindfulness Solution)

There are many definitions of what it means to be mindful, but the simplest way I can explain it would be to say:

Mindfulness means focusing on the present moment in a non-judgemental and non-resistant way

Let's break this definition down into three aspects:

Present Moment

The present moment is all we really have, but this is something we tend to forget. We spend most of our time worrying about the future or feeling guilty about the

past. Our inability to focus on the present moment means we do not appreciate what is right in front of us because we are too busy thinking about something else - it means we live our life as if we are not really there. Mindfulness involves focusing on the present moment so that we don't walk through our lives on autopilot.

Non-Judgemental Attitude

“Mindfulness teaches you to recognise memories and damaging thoughts as they arise. It reminds you that they are memories. They are like propaganda, they are not real. They are not you.”

Mark Williams (Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Peace in a Frantic World)

There is a voice inside of our heads that provides an almost constant commentary to go along with our experiences - e.g. ‘I like this’, ‘I don't like that’, or ‘I don't care about this’. This type of discursive thinking prevents us from fully appreciating what we are experiencing because it means we see everything through filters. Mindfulness is a non-judgemental attitude to the present moment where we just experience what is there with the same wonder as a small child.

Non-Resistant Attitude

Most of our suffering arises because we are resisting what is happening in the moment. This often involves illogical thinking like ‘it shouldn’t be like this’. Discomfort is a part of life, but suffering occurs when we resist this discomfort – or to put it another way, pain is inevitable but suffering is optional. Mindfulness requires this accepting attitude to whatever it is we are experiencing.

“Mindfulness frees us of forgetfulness and dispersion and makes it possible to live fully each minute of life. Mindfulness enables us to live.”

Thich Nhat Hanh (The Miracle of Mindfulness)

Difference between Being Mindful and Mindfulness Practice

Mindfulness is a natural state that anyone can experience at any time.

Mindfulness practice is a deliberate attempt to be mindful with the intention to increase the likelihood of you experiencing natural mindfulness. The practice you choose to help you increase your level of mindfulness is not important – the only thing that matters is that you make mindfulness a part of your life.

Lesson Two: Mindfulness for Anxiety

There are so many things that can go wrong in our life, and it is always going to be easy to find things to worry about. Even if you win the lottery tomorrow, there is still the risk that you could be hit by a lorry while going to collect your winnings. If you are prone to worrying about things, it can make it hard for you to enjoy your life because it means you are just waiting for the bad stuff to happen.

Focusing too much on the negative in life can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy - this is where your anxiety causes the event you are worried about to happen (e.g. you are fretting so much about losing your job that you can't perform well at work and this causes you to lose your job). Mindfulness can be an effective tool for overcoming this type of chronic worry.

"By taking this opportunity to learn and develop skills for being more present, you can realize in yourself the spaciousness and stillness that can safely contain even the most anxious moments of heart and mind"

Jeffrey Brantley - Calming Your Anxious Mind

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a general term we use to describe certain symptoms we experienced when we feel apprehensive about something. These physical and mental changes occur because the body has gone into a state of physical arousal (fight or flight response). The symptoms of anxiety can include:

- Insomnia
- Irrational worries
- Comfort eating or loss of appetite
- A Feeling of impending doom
- Fast heart rate
- Tension in the body
- A feeling of tightness in the chest
- Irritability
- Inability to relax
- Muscle tension
- Racing thoughts - obsessive thinking

- Stomach problems (e.g. Indigestion)
- Panic attacks
- Flashbacks

All humans experience anxiety from time to time, and this state can be helpful in certain situations - e.g. feeling stressed before an exam might encourage you to study harder. The problem is that many experience anxiety that is dysfunctional because it is way out of proportion to the threat facing us. Chronic anxiety can mean we make mountains out of molehills, and it can leave us feeling powerless to manage our problems.

Dangers of Chronic Anxiety

- Increased risk of coronary heart disease
- Chronic insomnia
- A weakened immune system (due to high levels of cortisol created by stress)
- Increased risk of depression

- It can be used as a justification for relapse
- Reduced ability to deal with problems in life
- Reduced ability to make good decisions
- Low energy levels

Mindfulness for Anxiety

“...acceptance....a conscious choice to experience our sensations, feelings, and thoughts just as they are, moment to moment”

Christopher K. Germer (The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion)

Anxiety is fuelled by patterns of negative thinking. For example, if an anxious person gets what they perceive as a 'dirty look' from their boss, they may automatically assume that this means they are about to lose their job, and this can lead to a great deal of anxiety. Mindfulness is all about developing a new relationship with thoughts so that we don't just always expect the worst and suffer as a result of this negativity.

Mindfulness gives you the ability to be more objective about your thoughts, so you no longer just react automatically like a ball in a pinball machine. Chronic anxiety occurs due to a conditioned response to any perceived threats but mindfulness allows you to break free of this conditioning.

The present moment is a refuge you can escape to no matter how big the challenges you are facing in your life. Just by being mindful for a few seconds, it moves you out of a high state of arousal, so you can think more rationally. It also means the tension starts to leave your body.

How to Deal with Anxiety Mindfully

Mindfulness means experiencing what is happening right now in an accepting way without judgements and resistance. Anxiety can be experienced as sensations in our body (e.g. abdominal discomfort), and you can put your attention on these sensations rather than the stories in your head. By just experiencing the anxiety in an accepting way, your body begins to relax and your thoughts start to slow down.

Resources

<http://www.patient.co.uk/health/generalised-anxiety-disorder-leaflet>

http://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletters/Harvard_Womens_Health_Watch/2008/July/Anxiety_and_physical_illness

Lesson Three - Mindfulness for Addiction Cravings

I always felt like a complete loser every time I relapsed after a period of sobriety. How could I be so weak and stupid? I could clearly see how my life improved when I wasn't drinking, so there was no way to rationalise the decision. The problem was that my ability to make good decisions would vanish when I was experiencing cravings. It was only after I began to practice mindfulness that I found a way to overcome this mental self-sabotage.

"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."

Viktor Frankl

What You Need to Understand about Addiction Cravings

A craving is just a thought. You experience thousands of thoughts each day, but only some of this mental chatter is going to have an impact on your behaviour. There is nothing particularly special about a craving other than that your brain has been conditioned to respond to this thought in a particular way.

The reason it can be so difficult to manage cravings is because it takes over your thinking. The initial thought may have been in response to something simple in your environment (e.g. a song on the radio you associate with getting high), but it triggers other thoughts and feelings, and it is this that gives the craving momentum. Unless you are able to stop the progression, the craving can grow in intensity until you feel overwhelmed.

We don't give in to cravings because we are weak or stupid. It is just that our brains have been conditioned to react in a certain way to this type of thought. The

reason so many of us are unable to explain why we relapsed is that we were on automatic-pilot when we picked up again.

How Mindfulness Can Be Used for Dealing with Addiction Cravings

Do you decide which thoughts appear in your head? Let's try a little experiment to see if you can. I want you to put your full attention on the sensation in your left foot and keep it there for 60 seconds. Were you able to do this? Unless you already skilled at focusing your attention, you are likely to have experienced other thoughts popping into your mind. How can this happen if you are in control of your thoughts? The reality is your thoughts are triggered by internal and external stimuli, and this is why spiritual paths like Buddhism emphasise the idea that we are not our thoughts.

You don't get much of a choice about the thoughts that arise in your mind, but you can decide how you respond to them. If you weren't able to do this to some extent already, it would be impossible for you to function in society. This is because our initial thoughts in response to an event can be completely illogical and perhaps even nasty. Here's an example of what I mean, if I'm driving in a bad mood, my first reaction to being cut-off in traffic might be to imagine crashing into the back of the other car. It is easy for me to dismiss this thought because it is so obviously crazy. We all have silly thoughts like this each day that we are able to ignore - at least, I hope it is not just me.

Some people suggest that the way to win against cravings is to fight them. The problem with this approach is that it is often just adding fuel to the fire. It is like a bouncer in a nightclub picking a fight with a rowdy customer who was already leaving. What you resist persists and fighting cravings is a battle you are probably going to lose because you are fighting your own mind.

"Mindfulness is not only about paying attention to what is occurring but also about having compassion and, as best we can, adopting a non-judgmental stance towards whatever is arising"

Sarah Bowen, Neha Chawla, and G. Alan Marlatt (Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention for Addictive Behaviors: A Clinician's Guide)

Mindfulness gives you the ability to observe cravings in such a way as to make them appear less threatening. Instead of just automatically reacting to this thought, you develop the ability to observe it in a more objective way. You get to see that cravings just arise briefly in your mind and disappear so long as you let them be. The truth is the only power these thoughts ever had was the power you gave to them. Mindfulness is all about removing the sting from cravings, so you are no longer harmed by them.

Lesson Four - Developing self-compassion

If I treated other people as badly as I have treated myself, I would not have any friends, and I'd probably be in prison. I've taken many wrong turns in life, but the situation has so often been made significantly worse because of my lack of self-compassion. At those times when I have been most in need of kindness, there has been a voice inside me head that bullied me mercilessly. It is only by developing some self-compassion that I was able to escape the clothes of this inner-tyrant.

“But the evidence is now overwhelming: feeling love and compassion for ourselves and others is deeply healing and soothing, and helps us face the many challenges that will come our way.”

Paul Gilbert (The Compassionate Mind)

Importance of Self-Compassion When Practicing Mindfulness

I have found there to be three key elements to using mindfulness effectively:

- . The intention to experience the present moment
- . A non-judgemental and non-resistant attitude to what is being experienced
- . Self-compassion

Until you develop sufficient self-compassion, it is not going to be possible to fully relax into the present moment. This lack of self-compassion means you believe there is something important missing from your life. By not accepting who you are right now, you are rejecting what exists in the present moment. Self-compassion means recognising that you deserve kindness and that everything you need to be happy is already here now.

"Pain creates a conflict between the way things are and how we'd like them to be and that makes our lives feel unsatisfactory. The more we wish our lives were different, the worse we feel."

Christopher K. Germer (The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion)

How Discursive Thinking Can Make Life Miserable

Imagine you were in a cinema watching a movie and beside you was a friend who was constantly whispering into your ear and criticising everything about the film - a steady stream of comments like "the acting is awful", "that is so obviously fake", "I knew that was going to happen". If you were in this situation, do you think you would be able to enjoy the movie? Of Course you wouldn't – yet, this is the exact situation you are in when it comes to discursive thinking. This almost constant soundtrack of negativity and criticism can suck all the joy out of life.

The purpose of developing self-compassion is to change your inner dialogue to one that is more supportive and encouraging. It is basically about offering yourself the same level of kindness as you would give to a good friend - isn't that a reasonable thing to do?

How to Develop Self-Compassion

"Owning our story and loving ourselves through that process is the bravest thing that we will ever do."

Brene Brown (The Gifts of Imperfection)

You have probably done things during your years of addiction that you feel ashamed or guilty about. This may mean you feel undeserving even of your own compassion. This type of thinking fuels addictive behaviour, and it only means you are likely to hurt more people in the future. Here is the truth - as far as we

know, none of us asked to be here, and even when we were behaving badly, it may have been all we were capable of doing at the time. Self-compassion is the recognition that nobody is perfect, and if you don't deserve compassion, nobody else does either.

Some of us try to rationalise the need for our inner-bully by believing that it is motivating us to achieve more in life. This belief is not supported by reality. If you are dealing with discursive thinking that is overly negative, it is going to steal your energy and reduce your self-esteem. This voice in your head is not being cruel to be kind, it is just being unnecessarily cruel.

Developing self-compassion is a skill you can learn, and one of the most effective ways of doing this is a technique called loving-kindness (metta) meditation. This is one of the tools you will pick up at Hope Rehab as part of the mindfulness programme, but here are some basic instructions.

- Close your eyes and take 5 deep breaths
- Feel your body relaxing and your mind letting go of all your worries and concerns
- Gently bring your attention to the area around your heart
- Start repeating the following phrases silently “may I be happy, may I be healthy, may I be safe, may I have peace of mind
- Continue for 5 to 10 minutes

The full loving-kindness meditation also involves developing compassion for other people, but it is best to start off by developing compassion for yourself.

Lesson Five - Mindfulness for Depression

Giving up alcohol or drugs is going to lead to some dramatic improvements, but it doesn't mean you are going to escape the ups and downs of normal living. One of the challenges you may have to face in sobriety is depression. If you have experienced depression in the past, there is an increased likelihood that you are going to experience it again in the future. Mindfulness is proven technique for preventing and dealing with this state of low mood.

Depression Explained

Depression refers to a persistent period of low mood. It is far more intense than regular sadness, which is a normal human emotion, because it changes the way the person behaves and experiences reality. Depression sucks all the enjoyment out of life, and it can get so bad that even getting out of bed feels like an impossible challenge.

An episode of depression can be triggered by an event (e.g. bereavement), ongoing life problems (e.g. financial worries), chemical changes in the body (e.g. post-natal depression), substance abuse, and even the change of season (seasonal adjustment disorder). People who have struggled with depression in the past can also find it is triggered by even normal episodes of sadness.

"...depression forges a connection in the brain between sad mood and negative thoughts, so that even normal sadness can reawaken major negative thoughts"
Mark Williams (The Mindful Way through Depression)

Depression involves a downward spiral. The initial trigger causes the person to experience low mood, and this leads to negative thinking (e.g. "I shouldn't be feeling this way, or "I don't want to be feeling this way"). The body reacts to the sadness and negative thoughts by becoming tense which can make the person feel

physically uncomfortable - it also causes insomnia and low energy levels which worsens the low mood.

Mindfulness for Depression

The downward spiral of depression is just like being stuck in quicksand because the more you struggle the further down you sink. The secret to escaping this predicament is to not struggle, and this is what mindfulness is all about. It means you can experience the initial low mood as just a feeling, and the negative thinking as just thoughts. By observing these thoughts and feelings objectively, you get to understand that they can't harm you, and that they will soon pass. It means you nip a potential episode of depression in the bud before it starts to interfere with your ability to cope with life.

"Most importantly, I seemed to be developing a whole new relationship with my thoughts. It wasn't that they'd really changed...but I could see that they were simply that: thoughts."

Julie Myerson (How Mindfulness Based Therapy Changed My Life - Guardian Newspaper)

There is good research to support the efficacy of mindfulness for dealing with depression, but it might not be suitable in all cases. Once the depression becomes severe, the only option may be to use drugs or other medical treatments. Mindfulness can still be a good option for these people once their depression is brought under control.

Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression

Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) is a program that combines mindfulness with CBT to help people dealing with depression. The goal of this approach is to break the link between negative mood and negative thinking. MBCT uses a slightly modified version of the ABC model -

A - Awareness of what we are experiencing

B - Be with what we are experiencing with resistance or judgements

C- Choose how to best respond to our experiences \

Resources

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2848393/>

<http://www.patient.co.uk/health/depression-leaflet>

Lesson Six - Obstacles to Mindfulness

Most people don't much convincing about the benefits of focusing on the present moment. It makes sense to us intellectually, and there is now mounting scientific evidence to support the benefit of mindfulness practice. The problem isn't seeing the need for mindfulness, but to remember to make it part of our lives. There are also a number of obstacles that can prevent us from developing mindfulness - these are sometimes referred to as the 5 hindrances (Thai: ห้ากิเลส/haa gilaed) which include:

Doubt

In order to commit to a mindfulness practice, you need to trust that the process is going to benefit you. A sceptical attitude is going to help you become more mindful (aka beginner's mind), but excessive doubt can also prevent you from developing trust in the process.

The key to overcoming excessive doubt is to recognise that this is just another thought. If you observe it mindfully, you will see that like all thoughts, it arises and disappears if you don't resist or grab onto it. Being mindful of doubt also allows you to objectively determine if this thought deserves your attention or not. Once you understand that doubts are part of the process of developing mindfulness, this obstacle becomes far less of a threat.

Practicing mindfulness does not require you to take on any new beliefs - you are just invited to observe the present moment in an accepting way, and it is up to you to decide if this is a beneficial way of experiencing reality. The fact that there are no beliefs involved means there is not much to doubt.

Desire

Mindfulness is about accepting whatever is happening in the present moment. Desire is an obstacle because it means you believe the present moment is lacking in some way. The modern world encourages a 'scarcity mentality', and this means that no matter how much we have, we still want more. In Thailand many local people believe in 'hungry ghosts' (เปรต/praed) - these are spirits with small mouths and enormous stomachs so they can never satisfy their hunger. Scarcity mentality has turned many of us into a type of hungry ghost.

The key to overcoming the obstacle of desire is to recognise that peace can be experienced in the present moment - there is nothing you can add to it to make it better.

Resistance

Most of our suffering in life is due to resistance, and this can be a major obstacle for developing mindfulness. The Buddha once explained how resistance turned discomfort into suffering using the analogy of the 'two arrows'. Being struck by an arrow is likely to be painful, but if we resist this discomfort, it is like being hit by another arrow because it doubles our suffering.

When practicing mindfulness, we are going to experience physical, mental, and emotional discomfort. If we just experience these episodes in an accepting way, they will not cause us to suffer. We learn that pain and mental discomfort is a part of life, but the suffering is optional.

Restlessness

Sometimes it can be difficult to calm the mind enough to be fully focused on the present moment. Our mind can be racing with thoughts about all the good stuff we should be doing. One way to deal with this restlessness is to just focus on it mindfully like any other thought or emotion. This means we try to examine the experience of being restless like a scientist looking at a petri dish. Sometimes the restlessness can be so severe that it just feels impossible to focus, and at these times remembering that life is short and that we are going to die soon can bring us back to the present moment.

Sleepiness

It seems that most of these days are chronically tired because we don't get enough sleep. Sometimes sleepiness can be something you can observe in a mindful way, but it may be that at this moment, you need a nap more than you need to practice mindfulness. There are stories of Thai Buddhist monks meditating on the edge of steep cliffs to discourage sleepiness (if they fall asleep, they die), but this is not recommended or necessary for developing mindfulness in our daily lives.

If you make mindfulness part of your new sober life, you are likely to have to deal with all of the five hindrances as you progress along this path. These are going to be far less of an obstacle once you understand them as part of the process.

Lesson Seven: Mindful Living

Mindfulness can only be of benefit to you if you make it part of your life. Reading lots of books, going on mindfulness courses, and talking about mindfulness can be fun things to do, but they are not necessarily going to make you more mindful - in fact, all of that stuff could become one huge distraction that makes it harder for you to be mindful.

A huge challenge for those of us trying to make mindfulness a part of our lives is that our habit is to be mindless. We are used to the thinking-mind calling the shots, and this means our normal awareness is full of judgments and we keep on being pulled towards thoughts about the past or future.

The present moment is something we want to experience without judgments or mind-made stories, and this means our thinking-mind has nothing to do - the part of our brain that has been in control up to now suddenly finds itself in the back seat, and it responds to this change in status by fighting to regain our attention. This is why it can be easier to read mindfulness books than to actually be mindful because we are providing stuff for the thinking-mind to do.

"...we have been programmed and conditioned to have a miserable view of ourselves and life, a programming that gets us into trouble all the time"

Dr Charles T. Tart (Living the Mindful Life)

It would be great if we could just make the decision to be mindful, and then enjoy the rest of our lives living in the present moment. Unfortunately, it doesn't work like that. We have to repeatedly make the decision to be more mindful, and we need to keep on doing this for the rest of our life. The good news is that the more we practice mindfulness, the better we become at it, and the benefits of this effort makes it well-worthwhile.

"We see each moment as a new beginning, a new opportunity to start over, to tune in, to reconnect."

Jon Kabat-Zinn (Full Catastrophe Living)

Benefits of Living a More Mindful Life in Recovery

- It is effective for managing cravings
- It is a stress-buster
- It can prevent depression and be used to treat mild depression
- It is effective for dealing with anxiety and worry
- Mindful eating helps you develop a healthier relationship with food, and it can be good for weight management
- Being mindful means you get to fully live in the present moment instead of sleep-walking through life
- It improves your mental and physical health
- It is a spiritual path that allows you to develop insights into yourself and your place in the universe
- The present moment is a sanctuary you can escape to at any time
- It is an excellent tool for pain management
- It improves mental functioning including memory ability to focus
- It makes you less emotionally reactive
- It can ease the fear of death
- It makes living more satisfying
- It gives you an improved ability to build deep relationships with other people
- It increases empathy

How to Make Mindfulness a Part of Your Life

"Practice is like raising a duck. If it grows fast or slow, it's the duck's business not yours. Let go & just do your own work."

Ajahn Chah (อาจารย์ชา)

Mindfulness is a natural mental state that can arise effortlessly - e.g. you may be watching a beautiful sunset from the balcony of Hope Rehab, and you suddenly find yourself in the present moment without judgements or resistance.

Mindfulness practices are designed to deliberately bring you to this state, and the more you do them, the more you are likely to experience mindfulness naturally.

Some of the most popular mindfulness practices would include:

- Meditation
- Tai-Chi
- Walking in nature
- Yoga
- Chi-Running
- Qi-Gong (Chi-Kung)

It is important to understand that just doing these practices doesn't automatically guarantee that you are developing your mindfulness - it is possible to do all of these activities in a mindless way (e.g. you could spend most of your yoga time thinking about what you are going to eat for dinner). Another thing to understand is that you can do any activity mindfully, so the list of potential mindful practices is almost infinite.

Another path to increasing your mindfulness would be to add some touchstone (touch point) exercises to your daily routine. This is where you make the intention to be mindful while performing certain routine actions such as:

- Driving

- Brushing your teeth
- Washing the dishes
- Cooking food

There are also other things you can do to encourage regular episodes of mindfulness such as setting an alarm to ring at certain times of the day - when you hear the bell, you bring your attention to the present moment. There are now a number of smartphone apps that act as mindfulness alarms.

If you want to start living a more mindful life, it is recommended you incorporate at least one mindful practice or mindful touchstone into your life. Even a tiny seed will eventually blossom into something magnificent, if you tend to it on a daily basis. Developing mindfulness is not a hard thing to do, and the rewards are incredible, but you just need to remember to do it.

Lesson Eight - Mindful Eating

Mindful eating is all about learning to enjoy food. It is not a fad diet, and it is not about using willpower to control your weight. It is about learning to trust your body, and to develop a healthy lifestyle by giving your body what it wants. The reason so many of us struggle with nutritional deficiencies and obesity is we just don't listen to our bodies – we don't know how. We have also developed powerful habits that mean making bad decisions in regards to nutrition is something we just do automatically a lot of the time.

It is hardly surprising that so many of us struggle with weight issues when we are live in a society that encourages us to overeat and live a sedentary lifestyle. More money is spent on advertising food than any other type of product. The foods that are most heavily promoted tend to be the unhealthy ones that are full of sugar, fat, and salt.

Comfort Eating

Comfort eating is an attempt to soothe our emotions using food. This is a habit that many of us develop in childhood when we are taught to associate food with reward. Comfort foods tend to be high in sugar, fat, and salt - these nutrients are known to trigger the release of dopamine in the brain, so the food gives us a lot of pleasure. Comfort eating can give us a temporary feeling of escape from our problems, but the price we end up paying for this escape becomes too high over time.

Comfort eating is conditioned behaviour - it is something we do without even thinking about it. For example, our response to any type of negative emotion may be to automatically go to the fridge. Habit energy is powerful, and it means our life is being pulled to a destination we never planned to go to.

When comfort eating is combined with self-loathing, it creates a vicious cycle that pulls us deeper and deeper into misery. It means we end up overeating to deal with the negative feelings of self-loathing that are generated by overeating.

A Hunger We Never Really Satisfy

"Mindfulness is rooted in the realization that when we are ignoring what we are seeing, touching, or eating, it is as if it does not exist."

Jan Chozen Bays (Mindful Eating)

Much of the food we consume tends to be eaten mindlessly - especially if we enjoy TV dinners. The fact that we don't really taste our food, or experience the joy of eating, means that we still feel unsatisfied by the end of the meal. It is like we haven't really eaten anything at all, and this means that although our physical hunger has been satisfied, we still feel mentally hungry. It is this that causes us to keep on eating long after our physical hunger has been taken care of.

The Benefits of Mindful Eating

- It allows you to fully appreciate your food
- It means you no longer need to bother with unhealthy yo-yo dieting to manage your weight
- It means you can enjoy food without feelings of guilt
- It encourages you to make healthier food choices
- You learn to choose foods that provide your body with vitality and energy

How to Eat Mindfully

"Mindful eating means simple eating or drinking while being aware of each bite or sip"

Thich Nhat Hanh and Lilian Cheung (Savor: Mindful Eating, Mindful Life)

By being fully in the present while you are eating, you get to experience how your body is reacting to the food you are ingesting. It means you recognise when you feel full, rather than waiting until the plate is empty. You also learn how to distinguish feelings of tiredness and low mood from hunger, so you no longer eat on automatic pilot. It also gives you the ability to clearly see how different foods affect your body and mind. You start making healthy food choices because you want to, and you eat fewer calories because you want to.

Lesson Nine - Mindfulness of Anger

Telling you ‘not to be angry’, is about as helpful as telling a depressed person to ‘cheer up’. Anger is a part of the human experience, and we suffer more when we try to suppress it or ignore it. In the western world, there is also the idea of ‘venting your anger’, but this can be dangerous as trying to bottle it up.

Anger and Storehouse Consciousness

In Buddhist psychology there is a concept called storehouse consciousness (alaya-vijnana). This is where all thoughts and other mental phenomena originate. The contents of storehouse consciousness are like seeds that are only able to blossom when the conditions are right. So, if the conditions are a certain way, it causes anger to rise up in our minds.

Every time we respond to a thought or feeling arising from our storehouse consciousness, this seed becomes stronger. If this happens enough, it means the thought or feeling can be so strong that it overwhelms us when it enters our mind (this is what happens with cravings).

If we observe anything arising from our storehouse consciousness without judgement or resistance (mindfully), it won't overwhelm us. By being mindful, we can experience anger without it negatively impacting our life.

The problem with 'venting our anger' is that it strengthens this emotion. It is sort of like eating a large Thai meal - we feel satisfied afterwards, but we are hungry again in thirty minutes. Venting our anger isn't an effective solution because there is not going to be any end to this anger.

The Difference between Anger and Reactive Anger

Anger is just an emotion that you will see arises and passes away if you are mindful. You can learn a great deal about yourself if you investigate the true source of your anger— this may have little to do with the thing you are getting angry about. For example, when you get angry at a stranger who bumped into you, it may be really because your boss talked disrespectfully to you earlier in the day.

Reactive anger is when you act out of anger. If you lash out at somebody because you feel angry, this means you are being reactive. This ‘acting out’ due to the anger is mostly impulsive, so it often leads to actions the person regrets afterwards. In his book ‘The Path of Purification’ the monk Bhadantacariya Buddhaghosa described reactive anger this way:

“By doing this you are like a man who wants to hit another and picks up a burning ember or excrement in his hand and so first burns himself or makes himself stink.”

If you are regularly overwhelmed by anger, it is likely going to damage your health, your relationships, and your opportunities in life. It is also going to put you at high risk of relapse.

How to Deal with Anger Mindfully

“If your house is on fire, the most urgent thing to do is to go back and try to put out the fire, not to run after the person you believe to be the arsonist”

Thich Nhat Hanh (Anger- Wisdom for Cooling the Flames)

Anger isn't bad, and you never need to feel guilty about feeling angry. If you try to suppress it though, you will suffer. If you act on it impulsively, you will also suffer. The mindful solution to anger is to just experience this feeling and listening to the lesson it is trying to teach you.

Your emotions always have an impact on your body, and it can be much easier to be mindful of the physical sensations created by the anger – rather than focusing on the thoughts created by the anger. Doing this will allow your thoughts to slow down enough so that you are less likely to lash out blindly and do something you later regret.

Lesson 10 - Mindfulness and Finding Your Purpose in Life

“If you plan on being anything less than you are capable of being, you will probably be unhappy all the days of your life.”

Abraham Maslow

What is the point of life?

This is a hugely important question for anyone who is trying to build a new life in recovery. If your life now lacks meaning and purpose, there is going to be no real motivation to stay sober. Fear of the consequences of relapse will only provide you with a limited amount of motivation - if your life feels pointless, even the fear of death might not be enough to keep you sober.

The Purpose of Life is to Blossom

What is the purpose of a sunflower?

You could say that its purpose of a sunflower is to grow so that it can eventually blossom. The sunflower starts off as a seed that is full of potential. Maybe humans are a bit like this too? Perhaps our purpose in the universe is to blossom by living up to our potential. Just like sunflower seeds, some of us fail to grow, and some of us only partially blossom, but our purpose is always to blossom.

One theory about why people fall into addiction is that they are trying to self-medicate a deep sense of inner dissatisfaction with life. This ‘hole-in-the-soul’ appears when people are not living up to their potential because they have become stuck or have given up on themselves.

“Until we recognize and live in accord with our underlying purpose, our life may feel like a puzzle with missing pieces...”

Dan Millman (The Life You Were Born to Live)

The idea that people have a need to reach their potential is supported by the work of the Humanist psychologist Abraham Maslow. He talked about the need to self-actualize (to be what we can be) – this need seems to be hardwired into our brains.

Mindfulness and Finding Your Purpose in Recovery

So what does mindfulness have to do with finding your life purpose?

Answer – everything

The Buddha discouraged his followers from using intoxicants (alcohol or drugs). It wasn't that he believed there was anything inherently evil about these substances but because intoxication makes people mindless. The Buddha understood that without mindfulness, humans have no chance of blossoming and awakening to the truth of life.

Now that you are sober, you are in a much better position to discover your purpose in life. If you make mindfulness part of your new life, you make it much easier for this blossoming to occur.

Each human is full of seeds of potential, but the conditions have to be right for these seeds to blossom. If you are governed by habit energy, it means you live mostly on auto-pilot, and there is not much opportunity for these seeds to grow. There is also the problem that people can develop a self-image that prevents them from reaching their potential.

The goal of mindfulness is to awaken to the present moment and to stop living your life based on habits and self-limiting thoughts. This practice calms down the

churning in your mind enough so that your seeds of your potential can begin to grow – by loosening up your ideas about who you are, you have the opportunity to become the person you were meant to be.

One of the other important benefits of mindfulness is you become far more aware of what is happening in your body and mind. You become better at listening to your intuition, and this increases the likelihood that you will make choices that keep you on the right track in life – the path where you will be growing towards your potential and your life will have purpose.

Allowing yourself to blossom requires faith. There is all this potential inside of you, but you can't predict exactly how it is going to express itself. If your ideas about the future are too rigid, you will suffer due to disappointment and frustration. You need to trust the process and understand the future is going to be unlike anything you can imagine – the good news is that it can be even better than you could ever dare to hope for.

Lesson 11 - Mindfulness for Dealing with Relapse Triggers

Relapse triggers can weaken your resolve to build a new sober life, so you need to be prepared to deal with them. Mindfulness offers an effective strategy for dealing with anything that triggers the urge to drink or use to arise.

What is a Relapse Trigger?

A relapse trigger can be any thought, feeling, or environmental factor that causes you experience the urge to drink or use drugs. Perhaps an easier way to describe this type of trigger would be to say that it is the people, places, and things that you associate with substance abuse. The acronym HALT, lists the four most well-known relapse triggers which are hunger, anger, loneliness, and tiredness. The fact that substance abuse becomes so enmeshed in our lives means that the number of things we associate with drinking or using drugs can be huge. The HALT triggers are just the tip of the ice-berg, and cravings can also be set in motion by other triggers such as:

- Music we associate with substance abuse
- Drug paraphernalia
- TV shows we used to watch while high
- Special days such as Christmas
- Success – if we do good, we can develop a desire for a chemical reward
- Anxiety
- Depression or low-mood
- Self-pity
- Dishonesty
- Certain types of humour
- Physical discomfort
- Insomnia
- Criticism

One way to deal with relapse triggers is to develop different strategies for dealing with each one of them – for example, you might decide to avoid music that

reminds you of using. The problem with this approach is the number of potential triggers is so high that it would be unrealistic to expect us to develop strategies for all of them. The benefit of using mindfulness for dealing with these threats to our sobriety is it provides one solution for all of them.

A Mindful Description of Relapse Triggers

Unlike other approaches to relapse triggers which may emphasise avoidance, the goal with mindfulness is to learn how to identify and tolerate these triggers. In Buddhist psychology, they talk about storehouse consciousness. This is where all thoughts, feelings, and other mental factors are stored in the form of seeds. These seeds sprout up when the conditions are right for them to do so. The urge to drink or use drugs is one of these seeds - the fact that substance abuse has been such an important part of our life means there are many conditions that can cause this seed to arise (these conditions are our relapse triggers).

If we react to a seed that sprouts in our mind, it becomes stronger. This means that if this seed is triggered regularly enough, it can become so strong that it has the potential to overwhelm our thinking. Mindfulness means we just observe the seed as it arises in our mind, so we have the choice not to act on it. Every time we do this, the seed loses a bit of its power – it has always our response to relapse triggers that give them power.

The link between certain conditions and the desire to use or drink doesn't have to be permanent. We can create new associations. For example, you can begin to create new sober Christmas traditions, so you no longer associate this time of year with getting drunk.

Lesson 12 - Mindful Relationships

“Love from another adult does more than just satisfy us in the present. It ripples back in time for us, repairing, restoring, and renovating and inadequate past.”
David Richo – How to be an Adult in Relationships – The Five Keys to Mindful Loving

Mindlessness destroys your relationships. It sets you on a collision course with other humans, and it can put an impenetrable barrier between you and others. Some of the ways this mindlessness manifests in relationships would include:

- Not really listening to other people – this means they feel neglected
- Being so distracted you are not really there for your loved ones even when you are in the same room
- Relationships are harmed due to substance abuse (alcohol and drugs are always used to escape the present moment)
- Not taking the other person’s needs into consideration
- Mindlessness means you emotions control you – anger and violence
- Mindlessness means poor decision making which can harm your family
- Saying things without thinking them through

Mindfulness and the Brahma Viharas (พรหมวิหาร)

The Brahma Viharas (aka Four Divine Emotions) are four states that are cultivated as part of Buddhist mindfulness training. If you start to cultivate these four qualities, it will strengthen your relationships and allow you to love unconditionally. The Four Divine Emotions are:

- Metta (เมตตา) – Loving-Kindness (may all beings be happy)
- Karuna (กรุณา) – compassion (may all beings be free from suffering)
- Mudita (มุทิตา) – Empathetic joy- pleasure from other people’s joy
- Upekkha (อุเบกขา) – Equanimity - neither clinging or pushing away

The Art of Mindful Listening

One of the most helpful things you can do for another person is to listen to them with all of your attention. If you develop the ability of mindful listening, it can greatly deepen your relationships. Just staying quite long enough for the other person to speak isn't enough – people can sense when you are distracted or silently judging them.

Mindful listening is made up of three attributes:

- Self-awareness – you need to be able to notice what is going on inside of your mind and body while the other person is talking (e.g. are you thinking about what you are going to say next?)
- Concentration – the ability to focus on what the other person is saying
- Mindfulness – listen to what the other person is saying without judgement or resistance

Mindful Speech

The old schoolyard chant about ‘*sticks and stones may break your bones, but names will never hurt you*’ is patently false. Your words can cause great damage, and this is why one of the eight requirements of the mindfulness practice (in a Buddhist context) is ‘right speech’. This is not just a recommendation to avoid lying because we can also cause harm by gossiping and using the truth as a weapon.

Most harmful speech is unintentional – it happens because people are mindless and thinking about what they are saying. In order to practice mindful speech, you need to pause before each sentence and think about your words. It also means avoiding gossip or mindless chit-chat. It would be unrealistic to expect us to just

adopt mindful speech and do this the time, but it is a practice that we can work on.

Useful Resources

Paul's website <http://paulgarrigan.com/>

Mahasati meditation instruction (YouTube) <http://youtu.be/ow4ffdfw0BI>

Mindfulness Based Relapse Prevention (MBRP) <http://www.mindfulrp.com/>

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)
<http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/stress-reduction/>

Be Mindful UK <http://bemindful.co.uk/>

10 Mindful Postures (Thai/English) [YouTube] <http://youtu.be/E-gEO12BVNU>