

Student Counseling Services presents:
Self-Guided Foundations in
Mindfulness



CONNECTICUT
COLLEGE

Day 1: Introducing Mindfulness

Mindfulness Exercise: “3-minute Mindful Breathing Meditation (Relieve Stress)” accessed via YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEfs5TJZ6Nk>

Read: *Mindfulness* (Appendix A—page 12)

- This brief passage explores the definition of mindfulness. In what ways do you find yourself in a mindless state? Do you spend much of your days ruminating about the past and/or future? Do your mindless states distract you from the present moment? Employing mindfulness practices into your daily life can help you be more present-minded and better able to concentrate on your present tasks.

Read: *Why We Find It Hard to Meditate: Ed and Deb Shapiro explore common reasons and obstacles.* (Appendix B—pages 13 to 14)

- We often come up with many excuses to avoid engaging in adaptive coping strategies and/or to delay learning about resourceful self-help skills. Read this brief article and consider the ways in which you have delayed using mindfulness/relaxation/stress reduction techniques in your daily life. Learning how to challenge thoughts that enable avoidance can be a meaningful takeaway from daily mindfulness exercises.

Consider the following question: *Why practice Mindfulness?*

- Practicing mindfulness meditation boosts our immune system’s ability to fight off illness.
- Several studies have found that mindfulness increases positive emotions while reducing negative emotions and stress. Indeed, at least one study suggests it may be as good as antidepressants in fighting depression and preventing relapse.
- Research has found that it increases density of gray matter in brain regions linked to learning, memory, emotion regulation, and empathy.
- Mindfulness helps us focus: Studies suggest that mindfulness helps us tune out distractions and improves our memory and attention skills.

On Your Own: Try completing at least one mindfulness exercise each day for the next 5 days. See how this goes. Remember, it is normal to have distracting thoughts during mindfulness exercises (as addressed in the “Why we find it hard to meditate” and Appendix E: Circle of Meditation—page 17). When this happens, acknowledge the thoughts without judgement and then re-focus on the guided exercise. Repeat this process as often as necessary knowing that we get better and better with re-focusing on mindfulness exercises the more that we practice them.

Mindful Breathing Medication (5-Minute) accessed from YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmFUDkj1AqQ>

Day 2: Meditation and the Brain

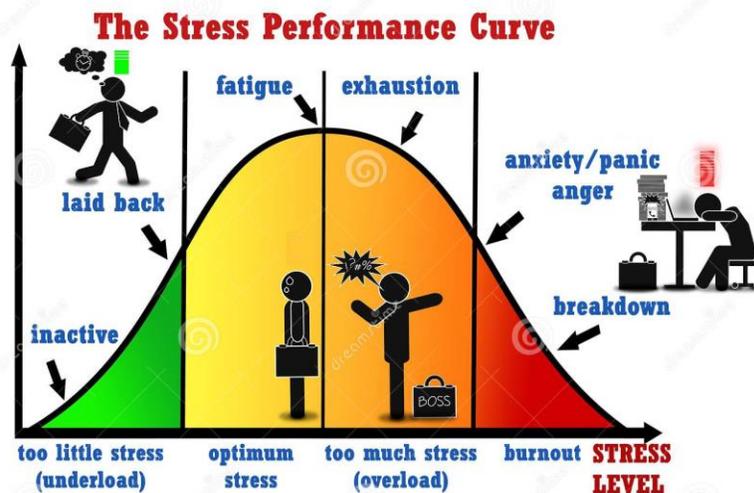
Mindfulness exercise: “5-Minute Meditation You Can Do Anywhere” accessed via YouTube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inpok4MKVLM>

Consider the following questions: *Did you know that feeling stress can help you get work done? How do you respond to stress? How do you cope with stress?*

Watch: “Stress Response: Savior to Killer” Robert Sapolsky, Professor of Neurology and Neurological Sciences at Stanford University accessed via YouTube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPS7GnromGo>



dreamstime.com

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How we think about stress will impact how we cope with stress. Reflect on “The Stress Performance Curve” picture above. Essentially, we need some stress in order to be productive. Stress can help motivate us to complete our tasks and accomplish our goals. However, we want to exercise stress reduction techniques to avoid exhaustion and burnout. This is where employing mindfulness and relaxation exercises can help you better manage and cope with the stress in your life.

Many of our stress reactions become habitual (e.g., negative thought patterns, rumination, procrastination, and/or substance use & other maladaptive avoidance behaviors). Mindfulness practices can help us adaptively cope with stress and re-train our brain to cope with stress in much more therapeutic ways. Research shows that, over time, meditation can change the brain! For example, meditators have more grey matter in their prefrontal cortexes, the area of the brain associated with regulation, higher-order planning, attention, and concentration.

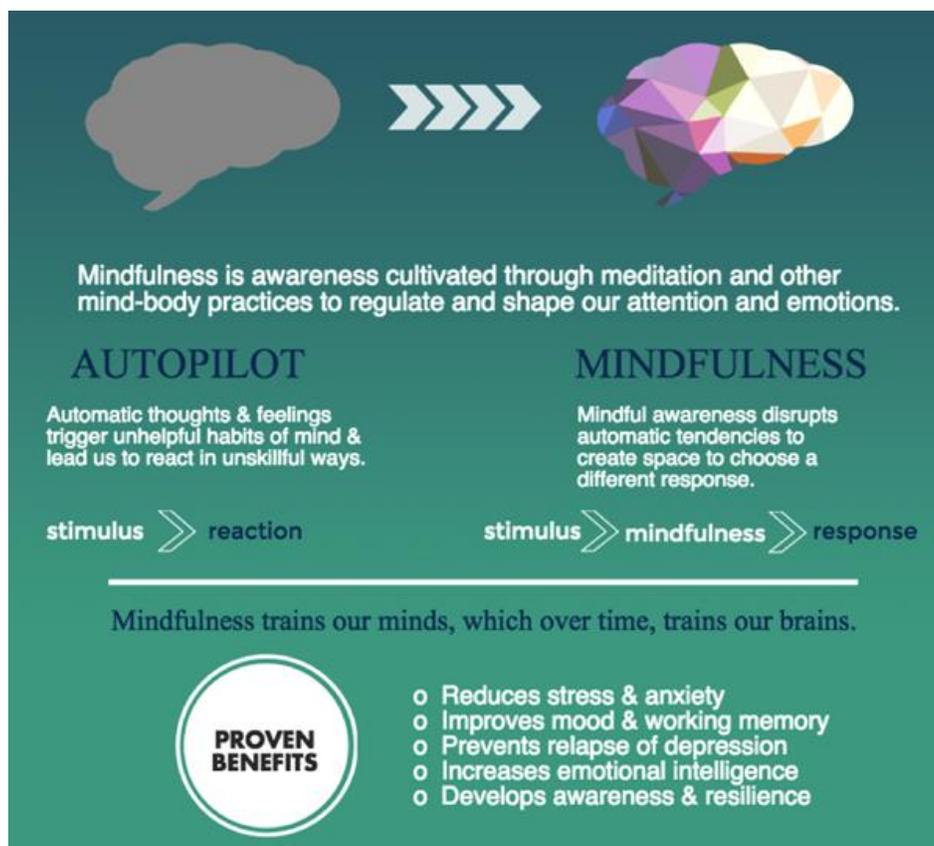
Watch: *The Science Behind Mindfulness Meditation* accessed via YouTube at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=20&v=VTA0j8FfCvs&feature=emb_logo

On Your Own: *“Body Scan Meditation (Tame Anxiety)”* accessed via YouTube at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QS2yDmWk0vs>

- Becoming more aware of your body, and how it is doing, is an indispensable takeaway from exercising mindfulness practices. Many mindfulness exercises can help us check-in with our bodies. You can search “mindful body scan” on YouTube to access many more exercises.

Additional mindfulness exercise: *“Progressive Muscle Relaxation- Guided Exercise”* accessed via YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86HUcX8ZtAk&t=266s>

- Progressive muscle guided relaxation exercises may be especially helpful before bedtime. We often experience an increase in rumination and anxiety right in those moments before we are trying to fall asleep. Try a progressive muscle relaxation exercise when this is happening. You can search “progressive muscle relaxation” on YouTube to find a variety of guided exercises.



Day 3: Using Mindfulness to Cope with Difficult Feelings

Mindfulness exercise: “Leaves on a stream ACT- Stop overthinking – Anxiety Skill #30” accessed via YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjKltKKSUR8&t=89s>

Consider the following question: *Why be mindful to difficult emotions?*

- Being mindful and attuned to negative emotions is difficult and non-intuitive. In times of anxiety, sadness, loneliness, and guilt we often want to escape the pain or push it away somehow. We may begin a mental struggle with the pain trying to mentally talk our way out of it, or we distract ourselves with activities or drown it out with food, or drink, or something stronger.
- All these ways of avoiding pain only perpetuate it. Avoidance creates suffering and keeps us from living.
- Instead of ‘turning away’ from pain in avoidance, we can learn to gently ‘turn towards’ what we’re experiencing. We can bring a caring open attention towards the wounded parts of ourselves and make wise choices about how to respond to ourselves and to life.
- It is by turning *towards* negative emotions that we find relief from them – not by turning away.

What do we do when our emotions seem overwhelming? Remember the acronym **RAIN**:

R—Recognize What’s Going On: Recognizing means consciously acknowledging, in any given moment, the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are affecting us. Like awakening from a dream, the first step out of the trance of unworthiness is simply to recognize that we are stuck, subject to painfully constricting beliefs, emotions, and physical sensations. Common signs of the trance include a critical inner voice, feelings of shame or fear, the squeeze of anxiety or the weight of depression in the body.

A—Allowing: Allowing means letting the thoughts, emotions, feelings, or sensations we have recognized simply be there. Typically, when we have an unpleasant experience, we react in one of three ways: by piling on the judgment; by numbing ourselves to our feelings; or by focusing our attention elsewhere. We allow by simply pausing with the intention to relax our resistance and let the experience be just as it is. Allowing our thoughts, emotions, or bodily sensations simply to be does not mean, for example, we agree with our conviction that we are unworthy. Rather, we honestly acknowledge the presence of our judgment, as well as the painful feelings underneath. For example, you could practice allowing by silently offering an encouraging word or phrase to yourself. For instance, you might feel the grip of fear and mentally whisper “yes” in order to acknowledge and accept the reality of your experience in this moment.

I—Investigating with Kindness: Investigating means calling on our natural curiosity—the desire to know truth—and directing a more focused attention to our present experience. Simply pausing to ask, “What is happening inside me?” can initiate recognition, but investigation adds a more active and pointed kind of inquiry. You might ask yourself: “What most wants attention?” “How am I experiencing this in my body?” or “What do I believe?” “What does this feeling want from me?” You might notice hollowness or

shakiness, then discover a sense of unworthiness and shame masked by those feelings. Unless you bring them into awareness, your unconscious beliefs and emotions can control your experience.

N—Natural Loving Awareness: Natural loving awareness occurs when identification with the self is loosened. This practice of non-identification means that our sense of who we are is not fused with any limiting emotions, sensations, or stories.



**Feeling Overwhelmed?
Remember “RAIN”**

Four steps to stop being so hard on ourselves.

R	A	I	N
Recognize what's going on	Allow the experience to be there, just as it is	Investigate with kindness	Natural awareness, which comes from not identifying with the experience

On Your Own: “Defusion from Thoughts,” *Mindfulness Exercise with Naomi Goodlet* accessed from YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9T5bvsyc5Tw>

Day 4: Using Mindfulness to Defuse Our Thoughts

Mindfulness exercise: “*Guided Meditation – Relaxing the Mind*” by Buddhism Guide accessed via YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNq7UGRBaQk>

Consider the following question: *Do you believe every thought you have? Did you know that your thoughts are not facts?*

- **Cognitive fusion** is the mind state of not being able to see thoughts as thoughts. It is the state of mind in which we are so fused with our thoughts that they appear to be synonymous with fact. Most suffering is the result of being fused to our beliefs.
- When we are in a state of cognitive fusion, we are stuck to our thoughts. It is almost as if we cannot separate ourselves from our thoughts. We are often so stuck to our thoughts that we cannot even see it. In a state of cognitive fusion, thinking completely dominates our behavior. We think or believe that something is true and we *act as if* it is true.
- “The primary cause of unhappiness is never the situation but your thoughts about it.” - Eckhart Tolle
- Mindfulness allows us to **defuse** our thoughts. In a state of defusion:
 - o We can see a thought for what it is and nothing more or less than a bunch of words or pictures inside your head
 - o We can recognize that a thought:
 - may or may not be true,
 - is definitely not a command we have to obey or a rule we have to follow,
 - is definitely not a threat to us,
 - is not something that is happening in the physical world, and
 - can be allowed to come and go of its own accord without any need for us to hold one, control, deny, or repress it.

Watch: “*Mindfulness Dissolves Thoughts – Attention is What’s Left over with Jon Kabat-Zinn*” accessed via YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LvLRheIPY90>

- When we become aware of our thoughts, we are more able to challenge them. The next time you observe yourself stuck in a negative thought pattern, try challenging them with the following questions:
 - o Is it true?
 - o Is it absolutely true?
 - o How does this thought make me feel?
 - o What would things be like if I did not hold this belief?

THOUGHTS are **NOT** FACTS PRACTICE

When you put some space between you and your reaction, it changes your relationship to your thoughts—you can watch them come and go instead of treating them as facts.

If you're stuck on a negative thought, ask yourself:

1

Is it true?

Often the answer is, "Well, yes." This is the brain initially reacting—the autopilot you live with and believe is you.

2

Is it **absolutely true**?

Is this thought 100% accurate? Can you see the thought in a different way?

3

How does **this thought make me feel**?

Notice any storylines you're holding onto, and name your feelings: *sad, angry, jealous, hurt*.

4

What would **things be like if I didn't hold this belief**?

Imagine possible benefits to your relationships, energy levels, and motivation.

Excerpt from *Uncovering Happiness* by Elisha Goldstein, Ph.D., adapted from *Loving What Is* by Byron Katie.

On Your Own: "Guided Meditation – Letting Thoughts Go" by Buddhism Guide accessed via YouTube at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_OU19T4r6E

Additional mindfulness exercise: "Day 5- Mindfulness of Thoughts Reload" accessed via YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTkzyggzMac>

Day 5: Mindful Self-Care and the Power of Positive Affirmations

Mindfulness exercise: “Powerful positive morning affirmations for positive day, wake up: 21 Day ‘I AM’ Affirmations” by Jason Stephenson accessed via YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZssjZnsN4Gg&t=212s>

Consider the following questions: What is self-care to you? How do you initiate *self-care* into your daily routine?

- Self-care is essential for wellbeing
 - o A little self-care can go a long way toward helping us lead happier, healthier lives. When we are spreading ourselves too thin, and are constantly over-scheduled, actually making time for self-care is half the battle. When we are mindful, we can also make the most of our self-care time.
 - If we’re mindful with good company, we can enjoy it more.
 - If we’re mindful when we exercise, we can work out without self-judgment
 - If we’re mindful when we travel, we can be present where we are.
 - If we’re mindful when we treat ourselves, we can relish it.

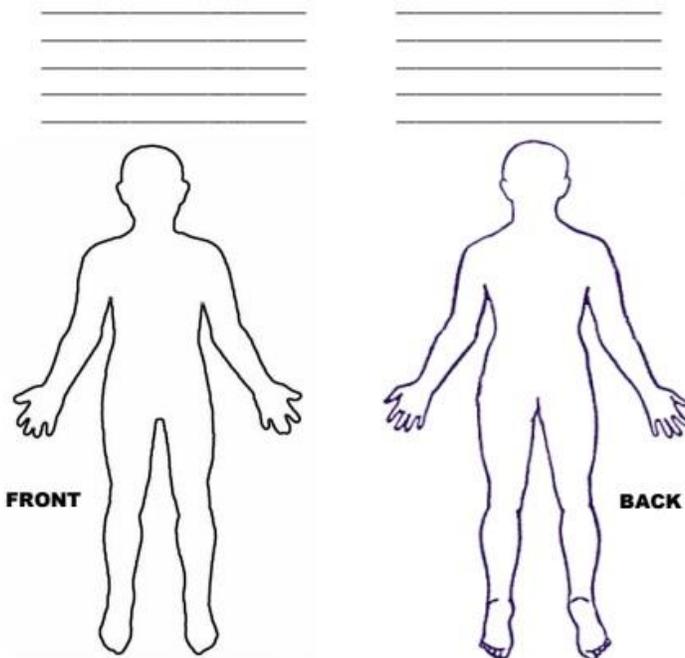


Complete: The “Where/How do you Receive Your Stress” worksheet.

- Mindfulness can help us identify how we experience our stress, acknowledge the aspects of our lives that are most stressful, and nonjudgmentally notice the unhealthy ways we might deal with our stress.

Where/How do You Receive Your Stress?

List symptoms and mark on the image below where you experience them in your body .



List all of the sources of stress in your life: work, relationships, academics, etc..

List any negative or unhealthy coping mechanisms you use when you are stressed.

Complete: The “Mindful Self-Care Plan” worksheet.

- Now that we know what is stressful in our lives, how our bodies receive our stress, and how we typically cope with stress, we can mindfully, and non-judgmentally, develop a self-care plan that is most effective for us.

’s Mindful Self-Care Plan

Write down healthy activities you currently use or can begin to incorporate on a regular basis to relieve or even prevent the stress reactions for each area.

What do you hope to gain in developing a self care plan?

From the diagram, choose your top 5 self-care activities.

List supportive people you can rely on when you are stressed.

Mindful Life Coaching Workshop Series – Week 3

On Your Own: Spend some time searching YouTube for free mindfulness relaxation exercises that you feel are empowering and motivational. Search phrases such as “mindful breathing,” “mindful body scan,” “guided mindfulness exercises,” “progressive muscle relaxation,” and “mindful relaxation.”

Additional mindfulness exercises: “Exam success meditation- Stay calm & deal with test taking nerves 7 anxiety” by Jason Stephenson accessed via YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AtFOT2fPvbl&t=325s>

“5 Minute guided meditation for gratitude/ mindful movement” by The Mindful Movement accessed via YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OCorEILKFQE>

Appendix A

Mindfulness Defined

Mindfulness

Did you ever open the refrigerator looking for something - but can't remember what? Ever drive clear past your exit on the highway without noticing -- or get introduced to someone and not remember their name? These are examples of *mindlessness* - so many things pass through the mind at one time that we lose our focus. This mindless state is the opposite of meditation, where we train the mind to pay attention to a single focus. When our single focus is on experiencing the moment, being fully present in any activity we're performing, we are practicing *mindfulness*, a kind of meditation in daily life. People adept at being mindful seem to be efficient, joyful and skillfully living their life.

Mindfulness is the practice of learning how to pay attention to what is occurring within our field of experience from moment to moment. It is an ancient practice particularly useful for people learning to elicit the relaxation response because it allows them to extend the benefits of relaxation into more areas of their daily lives. Mindfulness practice involves a combination of slowing down, doing one activity at a time and bringing full awareness to both outer activity and inner experience. It provides a potentially powerful antidote to the common causes of stress: time-pressure, fragmentation, overload, distraction, agitation and worry.

Mindfulness can be directed toward sensations in the body. Observing physical sensations can heighten awareness and invite relaxation. We can also be mindful toward our emotions, exploring their impact on the body, their causes, and their impermanence. We can even be mindful toward our own thinking processes; we can become aware of how afflicting thoughts affect our bodies.

- The practice of mindfulness is to practice maintaining full awareness from moment to moment.
- The breath is the focus that integrates and connects each activity.
- To be mindful is to wake up to the present reality and, with total attention, do one activity (or non-activity) at a time.
- Training the mind and body to focus at the beginning of each new activity, develops sustained concentration which is a practical tool to counteract the mind's tendency to become dull and distracted.

REFERENCES

- Thich Naht Hanh. *The Miracle of Mindfulness: A Manual on Meditation*. Beacon Press, 1976.
- Joseph Goldstein. *The Experience of Insight: A Simple and Direct Guide to Buddhist Meditation*. Shambhalla Publications, 1983.

Appendix B

Why We Find It Hard to Meditate

Translate

mindful

April 20, 2011

palousemindfulness.com

Why We Find It Hard to Meditate

Ed and Deb Shapiro explore common reasons and obstacles.

by Mindful Staff



What is it about something as simple as sitting still and watching our breath that evokes panic, fear, and even hostility? No matter how many reports there are proving the mental, emotional, and physical value of being quiet, there seems to be an even greater number who refuse to give it a try.

Meditation can certainly be challenging, and even more so if we are uncertain as to why we are doing it. It can seem very odd to sit there just listening to the incessant chatter in our head, and we easily get bored if we do nothing for too long, even if it's only 10 minutes.

After years of hearing a plethora of reasons why people find it hard to meditate, we have whittled it down to just a few:

1. I'm too busy, I don't have the time.

Which can certainly be true if you have young children and a full-time job, and all that these entail. However, we are only talking about maybe 10 minutes a day. Most of us spend more time than that reading the newspaper or idly surfing the web. It only appears like we don't have the time because we usually fill every moment with activity and never press the pause button.

2. I find it really uncomfortable to sit still for too long.

If you are trying to sit cross-legged on the floor then, yes, it will get uncomfortable. But you can sit upright in a firm and comfortable chair instead. Or, you can do walking meditation, or yoga, or tai chi. Moving meditation can be just as beneficial as sitting.

3. My mind won't stop thinking: *I can't relax. I can't meditate. I just can't! My mind will not get quiet; it flies all over the place! My thoughts are driving me mad! I'm trying to get away from myself, not look inside. Sound familiar?*

Surprisingly enough, trying to stop your mind from thinking is like trying to stop the wind – it's impossible. In the Eastern teaching the mind is described as being like a drunken monkey bitten by a scorpion because, just as a monkey leaps from branch to branch, so the mind leaps from one thing to another, constantly distracted and busy. So, when you come to sit still and try to quiet your mind, you find all this manic activity going on and it seems insanely noisy. It is actually nothing new, just that now you are becoming aware of it, whereas before you were immersed in it, unaware that such chatter was so constant.

This experience of the mind being so busy is very normal. Someone once estimated that in any one thirty-minute session of meditation we may have upward of three hundred thoughts. Years of busy mind, years of creating and maintaining dramas, years of stresses and confusion and self-centeredness, and the mind has no idea how to be still. Rather, it craves entertainment. It's not as if you can suddenly turn it off when you meditate, it just means you are like everyone else.

4. There are too many distractions, it's too noisy.

Gone are the days when we could disappear into a cave and be left undisturbed until we emerged some time later fully enlightened. Instead, we all have to deal with the sounds and impositions of the world around us. But – and it's a big but – we needn't let it impose. Cars going by outside? Fine. Let them go by, but just don't go with them. The quiet you are looking for is inside, not outside. The experience of stillness is accumulative: The more you sit, then slowly, slowly, the mind

becomes quieter, more joyful, despite whatever distraction there may be.

5. I don't see the benefit.

Unfortunately, this is where you have to take our word for it. Some people get how beneficial meditation is after just one session, but most of us take longer – you might notice a difference after a week, or maybe two of daily practice. Which means you have to trust the process enough to hang in there and keep going, even before you get the benefits.

Remember, music needs to be played for hours to get the notes right, while in Japan it can take 12 years to learn how to arrange flowers. Being still happens in a moment, but it may take some time before that moment comes—hence the need for patience.

6. I'm no good at this. I never get it right.

Actually, it's impossible to fail at meditation. Even if you sit for 20 minutes thinking non-stop meaningless thoughts, that's fine. There is no right or wrong, and there's no special technique. Deb's meditation teacher told her there are as many forms of meditation as there are people who practice it. So all you need do is find the way that works for you (even if you prefer to do it standing on your head) and keep at it.

The important point is that you make friends with meditation. It'll be of no help at all if you feel you have to meditate, for instance, and then feel guilty if you miss the allotted time or only do 10 minutes when you had promised to do 30. It is much better to practice for a just a sort time and to enjoy what you are doing than to sit there, teeth gritted, because you've been told that only 30 or even 40 minutes will have any affect. Meditation is

a companion to have throughout life, like an old friend you turn to when in need of support, inspiration, and clarity. It is to be enjoyed!

7. It's all just weird New Age hype.

It's certainly easy to get lost in the array of New Age promises of eternal happiness but meditation itself is as old as the hills. More than 2,500 years ago the Buddha was a dedicated meditator who tried and tested numerous different ways of enabling the mind to be quiet. And that's just one example. Each religion has its own variation on the theme, and all stretch back over the centuries. So nothing new here, and nothing weird.

In other words, meditation is not about forcing the mind to be absolutely still. Rather, it's a letting go of resistance, of whatever may arise: doubt, worry, uncertainty and feeling inadequate, the endless dramas, fear and desire. Every time you find your mind is drifting, daydreaming, remembering the past or planning ahead, just come back to now, come back to this moment. All you need do is pay attention and be with what is. Nothing else.

Ed and Deb Shapiro are featured bloggers at Oprah.com and HuffingtonPost.com. See their award-winning book: *BE THE CHANGE, How Meditation Can Transform You and the World*, with forewords by the Dalai Lama and Robert Thurman, with contributors Jack Kornfield, Jon Kabat-Zinn, Jane Fonda, Ram Dass, Byron Katie, and many others. They also have 3 meditation CDs: *Metta—Loving kindness and Forgiveness*; *Samadhi—Breath Awareness and Insight*; and *Yoga Nidra—Inner Conscious Relaxation*, which are available at: EdandDebShapiro.com

Appendix C

Diaphragmatic Breathing Technique

Diaphragmatic breathing technique

1. Lie on your back on a flat surface or in bed, with your knees bent and your head supported. You can use a pillow under your knees to support your legs. Place one hand on your upper chest and the other just below your rib cage. This will allow you



to feel your diaphragm move as you breathe.
Source: Cleveland Clinic (n.d.)

2. Breathe in slowly through your nose so that your stomach moves out against your hand. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.



Source: Cleveland Clinic (n.d.)

3. Tighten your stomach muscles, letting them fall inward as you exhale through pursed lips (see "Pursed Lip Breathing Technique"). The hand on your upper chest must remain as still as possible.



Source: Cleveland Clinic (n.d.)

When you first learn the diaphragmatic breathing technique, it may be easier for you to follow the instructions lying down, as shown on the first page. As you gain more practice, you can try the diaphragmatic breathing technique while sitting in a chair, as shown below.



To perform this exercise while sitting in a chair:
Cleveland Clinic (n.d.)

Source:

1. Sit comfortably, with your knees bent and your shoulders, head and neck relaxed.
2. Place one hand on your upper chest and the other just below your rib cage. This will allow you to feel your diaphragm move as you breathe.
3. Tighten your stomach muscles, letting them fall inward as you exhale through pursed lips (see "Pursed Lip Breathing Technique"). The hand on your upper chest must remain as still as possible.

Appendix D

"Mini" Relaxation Exercises

"MINI" RELAXATION EXERCISES

Mini relaxation exercises are focused breathing techniques that help reduce anxiety and tension immediately. You can do them with your eyes open or closed (but make sure your eyes are open when you are driving!).

You can do them any place, at any time, no one will know you're doing them.

Ways to "do a mini"...

Switch to diaphragmatic breathing; if you are having trouble, try inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. You should feel your stomach rising about an inch as you breathe in, and falling about an inch as you breathe out. If this is still difficult for you, lie on your back or on your stomach; you will be more aware of your breathing pattern. Remember, it is impossible to breathe diaphragmatically if you are holding your stomach in! So...relax your stomach muscles.

MINI VERSION 1

Count very slowly to yourself from ten down to zero, one number for each breath. Thus, with the first diaphragmatic breath, you say "ten" to yourself, with the next breath, you say "nine", etc. If you start feeling light-headed or dizzy, slow down the counting. When you get to "zero", see how you are feeling. If you are feeling better, great! If not, try doing it again.

MINI VERSION 2

As you inhale, count very slowly up to four; as you exhale, count slowly back down to one. Thus, as you inhale, you say to yourself "one, two, three, four," as you exhale, you say to yourself "four, three, two, one." Do this several times.

MINI VERSION 3

After each inhalation, pause for a few seconds; after you exhale, pause again for a few seconds. Do this for several breaths.

Good times to "do a mini"...

While stuck in traffic...when put on "hold" during an important phone call...in your doctor's waiting room...when someone says something which bothers you...at all red lights...waiting for a phone call...in the dentist's chair...when you're overwhelmed by what you need to accomplish ... in line...when in pain...

Appendix E
Circle of Meditation

Circle Of Meditation

