

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Cancer

Session 1 Handout

Awareness and Automatic Pilot

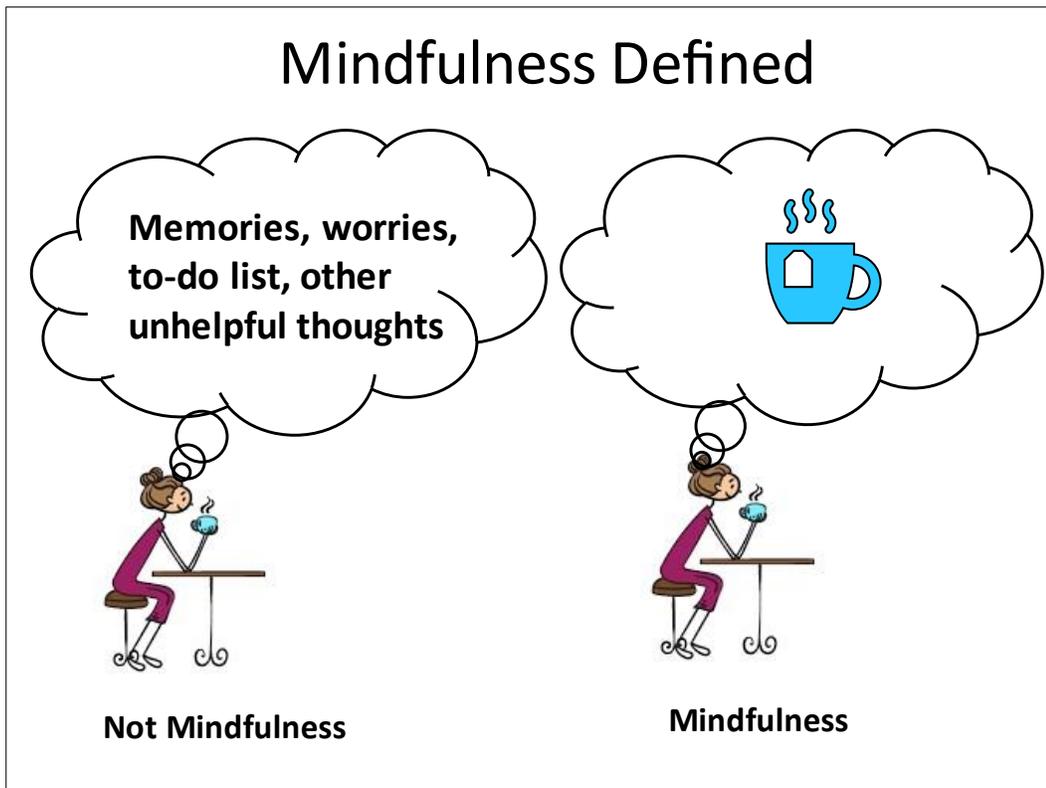
* Materials adapted from Trish Bartley, 2012, 2017, Wiley-Blackwell; Z. Segal et al, 2013, The Guildford Press, and Patricia Rockman 2017, The Centre for Mindfulness Studies.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a term that seems to be used everywhere, but we don't often think about what mindfulness really means. We sometimes have an idea that mindfulness means relaxing or being calm or having an empty mind, but this is not the case.

Jon Kabat-Zinn is the founder of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), an 8-week program that first started in 1979 at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. MBSR was designed to help people cope with stress, anxiety, pain, and chronic illness. Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy is built on the foundations of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction.

Jon Kabat-Zinn defines Mindfulness as "the awareness that emerges when you pay attention, on purpose, in the present moment without judgement- in the service of greater self-understanding, wisdom and wellbeing".(2013)



This picture might bring to mind the raisin or mindful eating practice we did in Session 1. Often, when we are doing an every day task like eating a raisin or drinking a cup of tea, our mind time-travels to the past or future and is filled with thoughts. When we bring mindful attention to everyday activities, we are

directly experiencing that activity through our senses, rather than thinking about it or thinking about something else.

How is paying attention in this way helpful?

Most of us have had the experience of driving or walking on "automatic pilot", without really being aware of what we are doing, the route we have taken, or what we have seen along the way. In the same way, it's easy to go through our lives without being fully aware of what we are doing. We can often be "miles (or kilometers!) away" without knowing it.

On automatic pilot, we are more likely to have our "buttons pressed." Events around us, thoughts, emotions, and sensations in the body can trigger unhelpful habits or reactions that might worsen our distress. And because we are operating on automatic pilot, we might not even be aware this is happening until it's too late to intervene and respond in a helpful way.

In our first session, we start to appreciate that when we are fully present in our experience, whether it's eating a raisin, drinking tea, or something else, we can slow down and notice things in more detail. By becoming more aware of our thoughts, feelings, and body sensations, from moment to moment, we give ourselves the possibility of greater freedom and choice. We might be facing a difficult situation, like a medical appointment or treatment, but we do not have to go into the same unhelpful "mental ruts".

The aim of this program is to increase our mindful awareness so that we can respond to situations with choice and intention rather than react automatically. We do this by training our attention. In session 1, we deliberately place our attention on the sensations of eating, or on sensations in a particular body part through the body scan. We notice when our attention moves (which it will) and then return our attention to our current place of focus over-and-over again. We refer to the exercises we do as "practices" to acknowledge that training attention is simple, but not easy.

Each week you will be given new practices to work with. Some of these practices will be longer and some will be shorter. You will be given the opportunity to "try them on" and to explore your own experience.

Setting Intentions

Settling into a comfortable posture ... Imagining that you are standing beside some water – a lake, or a stream or the ocean. The water is very clear and you can see a long way down to the bottom. Choosing an imaginary pebble and tossing it gently into the water – watching it sink very slowly down. Asking yourself – 'What do I most wish for myself from this course?' and 'What do I care about, that this course might support me with?' Not being concerned if answers don't come straight away, just continuing to gently ask – opening to the possibility of something emerging from within you. Eventually the pebble comes to rest...
Source: This exercise is adapted from Jon Kabat-Zinn

The intentions we set for ourselves remind us of what is important. Consciously cultivating intention may not be a familiar process but if we identify and stay connected with what matters to us, it will support us well. The work we do in this program should be in service of making space for what is most precious to us.

Reflecting on how you are now and what drew you to this program, your personal vision, values and aspirations will allow you to establish a foundation which will hold and support you as you bring mindfulness into your life. Remembering your intention also reminds you from moment to moment why you are practicing.

"At the deepest level, intention is simply a reflection upon why we are practicing, what we value and

what is most important to us. Intention involves setting the compass of the heart in the direction we want to head.”

Shapiro, de Sousa, and Jazaieri, 2016

In Session 1, we reflected on what our intentions for participating in this program are. As part of this week’s home practice, you may want to consider this more deeply.

- 1. What really matters to me?**
- 2. What do I wish for myself?**
- 3. What do I care about that this course might be able to help me with?**

Attitudes of Mindfulness: Non-Judging

It doesn't take long in meditation to discover that part of our mind is constantly evaluating our experiences, comparing them with other experiences or holding them up against expectations and standards that we create, often out of fear. Fear that I'm not good enough, that bad things will happen, that good things won't last, that other people might hurt me, that I won't get my way, that only I know anything, that I'm the only one who doesn't know anything. We tend to see things through tinted glasses: through the lens of whether something is good for me or bad for me, or whether or not it conforms to my beliefs or philosophy. If it is good, I like it. If it is bad, I don't like it. If it is neither, I have no feelings about it one way or the other, and may hardly notice it at all.

-Excerpt from *Wherever You Go There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life* by Jon Kabat-Zinn

As we practice together, and through your home practice, you will be invited to cultivate an attitude of openness, curiosity and compassion for your own experiences.

We sometimes also use the term “non-judging” to describe this, but in mindfulness non-judging doesn’t mean accepting things that are wrong or unfair or giving up. When we say non-judging, we mean honouring and respecting your own experience as it is, then choosing what to do next.

The human mind naturally has an engrained negativity bias and attitudes of openness and curiosity often allow us to broaden our perspective and see other possibilities for moving through the world, even during times of difficulty.

Each week in your session handouts we will also introduce you to one of the Attitudinal Foundations of Mindfulness, as outlined by Jon Kabat-Zinn. You are also welcomed to join us for a pre-session chat 15 minutes prior to the start of the next session during which we will explore our understanding of the foundation. Our pre-session chat before session 2 will include a discussion on non-judging.

"It is not the magnitude of the task that matters, it is the magnitude of our courage."

Matthieu Ricard, 2003

Two Kinds of Intelligence

Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks

There are two kinds of intelligence: one acquired, as a child in school memorizes facts and concepts from books and from what the teacher says, collecting information from the traditional sciences as well as from the new sciences.

With such intelligence you rise in the world. You get ranked ahead or behind others in regard to your competence in retaining information. You stroll with this intelligence in and out of fields of knowledge, getting always more marks on your preserving tablets.

There is another kind of tablet, one already completed and preserved inside you. A spring overflowing its springbox. A freshness in the center of the chest. This other intelligence does not turn yellow or stagnate. It's fluid, and it doesn't move from outside to inside through conduits of plumbing-learning.

This second knowing is a fountainhead from within you, moving out.

Story-I Never Promised you a Rose Garden

My backyard on the slopes of Mt. Tamalpais in Northern California is actually a very small meadow. In the summer and fall of every year, a stag visits at dawn and twilight. This is quite a thing for someone who grew up in Manhattan. This year he has six points on his antlers. Last year five or perhaps four. He is heart-stopping.

Actually, I did not plan to have a stag. I planned to have a rose garden. The year after I moved here, I planted fifteen rose bushes, gifts from my friends. It was a lot of hard work, but I could see it in my mind's eye. Just like in *Sunset Magazine*. The roses bloomed in the late spring and for a month the garden was glorious. Then the roses started disappearing. Puzzled, I eventually realized that something larger than aphids was eating them and became determined to catch it in the act. Getting up one dawn and glancing out the window, I was transfixed by seeing the stag for the first time. He looked like an illustration from one of my childhood books. As I watched in awe, he unhurriedly crossed the yard, browsed for a while among the roses, and then delicately ate one of my Queen Elizabeths.

Every year since then I have had to make a difficult choice. Am I going to put up higher fences and have roses, or am I going to have a stag ten feet from my back door? Every year so far, I have chosen the stag. After two years of watching each other through a pane of glass, I can now sit outside as he dines. If I tell people this, some say in disbelief, "You mean that you are letting this deer eat your roses?" Sometimes I will invite someone like this over to watch. One friend, stunned into silence by the sight, said simply, "Well, I guess we are always doing the right things for the wrong reasons."

I had thought I was planting rose bushes in order to have roses. It now seems I was actually planting rose bushes in order to have half an hour of silence with this magical animal every morning and every evening.

-Rachel Naomi Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom*, 10th Anniversary Edition

Home Practice

1. Body Scan

Try out the body scan each day this week using the recording provided. See if it's possible to give up all expectations and judgements about your practice is like or should be like, or notice if those expectations and judgements show up. Just let your experience be your experience. There's no such thing as a good or bad body scan and there are no marks assigned. Just do your best with the practice and make note of anything that comes up so that we can talk about it at the next session.

Note: There are several body scan recordings to choose from. There are two shorter practices and two longer practices. We recommend trying out a shorter practice daily or as frequently as often as makes sense for you, and perhaps treating yourself to a longer practice once during the week.

2. The Pause

Try out this practice several times a day over the next week.

Begin by stopping what you are doing- and asking yourself one of the following questions:

What is going on for me right now?

OR

How am I feeling right now?

Keep this very simple. You might want to adapt the question you ask yourself or create your own question. You are trying to tune into a felt sense of what is happening in this moment- not so much thinking about it.

3. Informal Practice

Bring mindful awareness to a routine daily activity, such as drinking tea, eating, washing dishes, brushing your teeth, opening the car door, or any other activity that you might normally do on "automatic pilot".

Resolve to bring a fresh quality of deliberate and gentle moment-to-moment awareness to the task or activity as best you can. Bringing awareness into these activities of daily living can make it easier to recognize when we are operating on automatic pilot and provides us with an instant alternative, namely, an opportunity to enter and dwell in the mode of being. In this way, we know what we are doing while we are doing it. Try this out and see what you notice.

Home Practice Log

Day	Practice	Comments and Experiences
Day 1	Body Scan The Pause Informal Practice	
Day 2	Body Scan The Pause Informal Practice	
Day 3	Body Scan The Pause Informal Practice	
Day 4	Body Scan The Pause Informal Practice	
Day 5	Body Scan The Pause Informal Practice	
Day 6	Body Scan The Pause Informal Practice	

*As you engage in this week's home practice, consider your intentions for the program through the following questions. What really matters to me? What do I wish for myself? What do I care about that this course might be able to help me with?