

## Mindfulness and Mitigating the Stress Response to COVID-19

Presenter: Hamed Dar  
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### EFAP Information

English: 1.800.663.1142  
French: 1.866.398.9505  
TTY: 1.888.384.1152  
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### Objectives of the workshop

- Understand the connection between mindfulness, health, and our physical and spiritual well-being
- Become introduced to mindfulness-based stress reduction
- Learn strategies for how to integrate mindfulness into everyday life, both during the COVID-19 outbreak and beyond
- Learn simple meditations that will calm the sympathetic nervous system, taking us out of fight-flight-freeze mode

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 **Agenda**

- COVID-19
- Defining mindfulness
- What the research says
- Mindfulness-based stress reduction
- Integrating mindfulness into crisis management and everyday life
- Mindful meditation



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 **Have you...**

- Started eating a snack bar, taken a couple of bites, then noticed all you had left was an empty packet in your hand?
- Been driving somewhere and arrived at your destination only to realize you remember nothing about your journey?
- Found yourself scrolling through social media and news sites, losing track of time?



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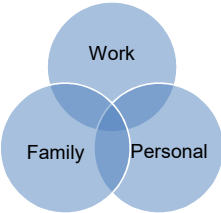
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 **COVID-19**

**Possible changes and disruptions due to COVID-19:**

- Increased/decreased workload and/or new responsibilities
- Worry over the well-being of family and friends
- Worry over your own well-being
- Social isolation
- Absence or limits to recreation/hobby activities (missed vacations, closed movie theatres)
- Childcare issues
- Financial hardship
- Job insecurity



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 COVID-19 (continued)

**Gratitude?**

- My job is flexible enough that I can work from home
- My friends and loved ones are currently well
- I am healthy
- Everyday I am seeing/hearing about acts of kindness
- My workload has decreased and I am able to work on some interesting side projects now
- Spending more time with family



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 An Astronaut's Guide to Self-Isolation



**Chris Hadfield  
Astronaut**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uL5sqe5Uk8>

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 Mindfulness according to Jon Kabat-Zinn

“Paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally.”



[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_detailpage&v=gWak2ml\\_rZw#t=50s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=gWak2ml_rZw#t=50s)

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 **How Can Mindfulness Help Me during a Crisis?**

1. Calm the sympathetic nervous system and relax
2. Shift from fight-flight-freeze response to rational thought
3. Enhance the quality of communications and relationships
4. Heighten the clarity of thinking and intentions
5. Improve resilience, efficiency and safety
6. Decrease stress, deepen peace of mind and sense of flow
7. Deepen insight and intuitive wisdom
8. Awaken more authenticity, heart, soul, and caring in our lives and work
9. Cultivate discernment as opposed to judgment
10. Strengthen self-awareness and self-confidence

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 **Defining mindfulness**

- Un-conditioning ourselves from critical thinking or cultivating discernment as opposed to judgment
- Coming to our senses literally and metaphorically
- Becoming human be-ings not human do-ings
- Paying attention to what is most fundamental in our life, as opposed to what is most urgent
- Cultivate intimacy or awareness with the ordinary and not take it for granted
  - Breathing activity



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 **Research findings**

Mindfulness Meditation has been shown to improve:

- Memory, sense of self, empathy
- Stress and anxiety
- Addiction
- Pain
- Psoriasis
- Blood pressure



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### The mindful brain

- Latest research shows we have the power to literally change our brains by changing our minds.
- The brain can adapt, heal, renew itself.
- 30 minutes of daily meditation practice for eight weeks can increase the density of grey matter in the brain regions associated with memory, stress and empathy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6AReFrDKg2s>

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### Areas of use for mindfulness

- Maintain your centre amidst uncertainty and chaos
- Stress reduction
- Improve quality of sleep
- Leadership development
- Improved learning
- Strengthen relationships
- Parenting
- Weight management
- Fitness
- Lifestyle change



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### Stress Reduction

- Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), a secular method of using Buddhist mindfulness, combining meditation with elements of yoga and education about stress and coping strategies.
- Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), which combines MBSR with principles of cognitive therapy (for example, recognizing and disengaging from negative thoughts) to prevent relapse of depression

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 **Integrating Mindfulness into crisis management**

Let it **RAIN**

- **Recognize** your thoughts and feelings
- **Allow** the thoughts or feelings to be there
- **Investigate** with gentle attention how the feeling or thought lives in your body
- **Nurture** yourself

(adapted from Tara Brach, 2020)

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 **Mindful Eating**

- Being more present when you eat and not taking food for granted.



- Appreciating your meals to remind you of your connection to the food, and to all living things.

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 **Mindfulness at work**

- Make a commitment to practice.
- In the course of your work, practice *really listening* to others, including when you are on video or on the phone. Give them your whole attention, as you would if you were in person.
- Consider ways to recognize other's accomplishments, needs, difficulties — we are all in this together.
- Pay close attention to your language around COVID-19
- Start slowly — *today I will become more aware of* \_\_\_\_\_ and practice by placing your attention on that.

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 **Mindful parenting**

*"Parenting is a mirror that forces you to look at yourself . If you can learn from what you observe, you just may have a chance to keep growing yourself."*  
Jon Kabat-Zinn



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 **Mindfulness meditation**

Four simple steps:

1. Choose a conducive environment
2. Breathe slowly and deeply
3. Be aware
4. Ending the session



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 **Five mindfulness exercises**

1. Mindful breathing
2. Concentration
3. Body scan: bring your awareness through your body, starting at your toes and moving up
4. Releasing tension
5. Walking meditation



Meditation Master:  
Thich Nhat Hanh

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 **Guided meditation**





- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_detailpage&v=IH3\\_64mLCU8#t=229s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=IH3_64mLCU8#t=229s)

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 **Meditation tools**

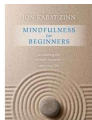
**Apps**

- **Insight Timer** is a free resource with guided music and guided meditations in many languages from different teachers. They have already published a series of Coronavirus related meditations
- **Headspace App** has a variety of paid and free offerings, for different levels, same narrator
- **Meditation Oasis Podcast** features free guided meditation and music for medication



**Books**

- Mindfulness for beginners, *Jon Kabat-Zinn*
- When things fall apart, *Pema Chodron*
- The untethered soul, *Michael Singer*
- The Radiance Sutras, *Lorin Roche*



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 **What should I do when . . .**

1. My mind keeps wandering off during meditation . . .
2. I keep falling asleep during meditation . . .
3. I find it so hard to concentrate or sit still during meditation . . .

Other common struggles include . . .

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 In summary . . .

- Any activity of daily life can be practiced with mindfulness
- Mindfulness is about bringing the mind back to here and now
- During the time you are practicing mindfulness you stop talking, not only on the outside but the talking inside

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 *"When we're in fight-flight-freeze mode, our limbic system has basically hijacked us, and we lose contact with our prefrontal cortex, the most recently evolved part of our brain, which has to do with executive functioning and making good decisions. When we name what's going on, we start to activate the prefrontal cortex. Mindfulness reconnects us with that."*

*Tara Brach*

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 *"The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past, worry about the future, or anticipate troubles, but to live in the present moment wisely and earnestly."*

*Shakyamuni Buddha.*

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