

Mindfulness and Meditation

- **What is mindfulness?:** “Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally, in the service of self-understanding and wisdom” (Jon Kabat-Zinn)
- **Meditation** is at the center of self-care and self-awareness. It is relaxed moment to moment awareness where healing can occur. This awareness helps you to identify the situations that cause you stress, which is the first step in managing stress. Meditation = being in the moment, here and now.
- Meditation is from the Sanskrit and Greek root word for "**medicine.**"
- **Types of meditation**
 - Concentrative meditation: Concentrating on the breath and words like soft belly or any mantra. Includes prayer and visual meditations. Focused awareness.
 - Mindfulness meditation: Awareness of thoughts, feelings, and sensations as they arise, without being focused on a particular object. You can choose to do any activity either mindlessly (automatically) or mindfully (with awareness). For example, you can walk, cook, or wash dishes mindlessly *or* mindfully.
 - Expressive or active meditation: Includes yoga, dancing, rapid breath work, whirling, and shaking. Quiet, awareness, and stillness come through and after great effort. The oldest healers have done this around the world for thousands of years.
- **Research:** Meditation can lower blood pressure, decrease pain, decrease frequency and intensity of asthma attacks, improve mood, decrease anxiety.
- **Tips for meditating**
 - Deep breathing could make you lightheaded or anxious. Instead, try to take gentle, natural breaths.
 - Try practicing in a quiet and comfortable place. Put cell phone on silent and limit distractions.
 - Take off shoes and loosen tight clothing.
 - Distraction is very common during meditation, even for experienced meditators. There is *no* perfect way to meditate and no such thing as a “perfect” meditator. The goal is to practice and to become more aware of the present moment. So, if you get distracted, that is normal. Try to catch yourself and bring yourself back to the exercise.

From the Center for Mind-Body Medicine (www.cmbm.org) and the VA CBT-CP Manual