



mindfulnurse

**a 10 day program to improve your well being,
strengthen your resilience and deepen the quality of care
you give.**



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Prologue.

How are you feeling at work these days?

OK then.....now how are you really feeling?

A typical shift will find many of us pressed with the need to multi-task, and parallel process one or more lists of priorities of care for our patients.

High stakes decision making is often demanded within an environment of chronic stress, acute pressure, fatigue and frequent chains of interruption. Add to this the suckiness that is shiftwork.

Does this sound about right?

The New York Times recently reported that:

Health care workers who are burned out are at higher risk for substance abuse, lying, cheating and even suicide. They tend to make more errors and lose their sense of empathy for others. And they are more prone to leave clinical practice¹.

¹Easing Doctor Burnout With Mindfulness – NYTimes.com [Internet]. [cited 2013 Oct 18]. Available from: http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/09/26/easing-doctor-burnout-with-mindfulness/?_r=0

Mindfulness:

The practice of mindfulness is now becoming an accepted skill that can be easily taught to enable Nurses and other healthcare professionals enhance their psychological and emotional resilience to the complex difficulties of their work.

There are an increasing number of studies that show even a short period of mindfulness training that has been modified for healthcare providers²:

...is associated with reductions in indicators of job burnout, depression, anxiety, and stress. Modified mindfulness training may be a time-efficient tool to help support clinician health and well-being, which may have implications for patient care³

Mindfulness may be just the practice you need to re-invigorate your work as a nurse.

It may also help you re-connect with yourself. Walking the walk of appreciating the fullness of each moment of life.

Dr Russ Harris, author of 'The Happiness Trap' describes the benefits of developing a regular mindfulness practice as growing the ability:

- to be fully present, here and now
- to experience unpleasant thoughts and feelings safely
- to become aware of what you're avoiding

²Levy DM, Wobbrock JO, Kaszniak AW, Ostergren M. The effects of mindfulness meditation training on multitasking in a high-stress information environment. Proceedings of the 2012 Graphics Interface Conference [Internet]. 2012 [cited 2013 Oct 18]. p. 45–52. Available from: <http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=2305285>

³Fortney L, Luchterhand C, Zakletskaia L, Zgierska A, Rakel D. Abbreviated Mindfulness Intervention for Job Satisfaction, Quality of Life, and Compassion in Primary Care Clinicians: A Pilot Study. The Annals of Family Medicine. 2013 Sep 9;11(5):412–20.

- to become more connected to yourself, to others and to the world around you
- to increase self-awareness
- to become less disturbed by and less reactive to unpleasant experiences
- to learn the distinction between you and your thoughts
- to have more direct contact with the world, rather than living through your thoughts
- to learn that everything changes; that thoughts and feelings come and go like the weather
- to have more balance, less emotional volatility
- to experience more calm and peacefulness
- to develop self-acceptance and self-compassion

MindfulNurse training.

Over the next 10 days I am going to show you some of the things you can easily do to begin to develop your own mindful practice. And yes, these exercises are all super easy.

The difficult part is making the commitment to begin, and then sticking with the exercises.

I will be making a commitment to do them right along with you. I am sure that if you stick with the program, by the end of this practice period you will already be seeing some changes in your experiences of work.

OK. You good?

What you will need to prepare...

1. **A space to sit.** I will be teaching you a simple meditation technique, so you will need somewhere quiet to do this. Ideally, you will want a dedicated spot that you can return to

each time. Somewhere where you will not be interrupted.

2. **A time to sit.** If possible, make the commitment to sit at the same time each day. The best time to do these exercises is early in the morning or at least before your shift begins. After work or in the evenings and you may find yourself nodding off. But as you shall see, that is perfectly OK.
Being nurses, with shift work and families....a regular sitting time is a tough call, so don't worry too much if you can't.
What is important is to do your sitting practice every day for the 2 weeks. That is the commitment. And as you will soon experience....it is only a very short commitment.
3. **Something to sit on.** I am sure you have seen many people meditating on small round cushions (called a Zafu in Japanese). If you are going to sit cross-legged on the floor you will need a pillow, cushion or folded blanket to sit on. I will go into the details of sitting posture soon.
Sitting cross legged is all well and good, but certainly not mandatory. If you are unable to manage this posture, a chair will be fine. You will want one with a nice flat sitting surface that allows you to sit straight with your back away from the backrest and your feet flat on the floor.
4. **Clothing.** Whilst you are doing the meditation practice, you will need to wear something comfortable that is not tight or constricting.
5. **Timer.** You will need some sort of timer to bring your meditation to an end. There are some great smartphone apps for this. I use the iPhone app *Meditator*, which has lots of configuration options as well as some nice chimes.
If you do not want to pay for an app, there are plenty of free

ones available. The alarm on your watch will do just fine.

6. **Other stuff.** Paper and pens. There will be a few written exercises (nothing too taxing, I promise) so a pad and pen will be needed.

There will be no incense, no chanting, no weird, freaky stuff.

You will not have to shave your head.

So there you go. This is not a full on mindfulness course, simply a set of exercises over a 10 day period that will give you a taster.

Enough to see if this is something that might really be of use for your professional development as a nurse....or simply not your cup of tea.

It's free, and it will only take a tiny amount of your time, for a potential large return.

What have you got to lose?



Featured image by: <http://www.melhunt.com/meditation-waves-and-water/>

Preparation.

OK. SO you have read the prologue, and decided you would like to have a crack at experiencing some improved mindfulness. Well, your exercise today is simply to read through the following information and pick a meditation posture that best suits you. We will be using this very shortly.

Mindfulness is not all about meditation, but it is an important part of it, so please study the instructions with care.

Then, take 1–2 minutes to practice your chosen posture. Just sit in it and feel it out. Take a moment or two to get all the 'instructions for posture' down pat.

There. That's it for today.

Posture:

It is very important to assume a strong meditation posture. It should be relaxed enough to allow you to sustain your mindfulness practice, yet erect enough to allow you to remain alert and aware, without slumping or sagging.

Sitting on the floor.

You will need to sit on a cushion (or two), pillow or folded blanket.

Sit on the forward half to third of the cushion so as you cross your legs they slope slightly downwards to your knees which should both be in contact with the floor. You do not want to sit too high on the cushion as this tilts the pelvis forward and causes you to lean back (arching the spine) in compensation.

The correct position forms a 'tripod' with the 3 points of contact being your knees and the base of your spine. If one of your knees does not reach the ground in this position you can place another cushion under it for support.

Selection of posture:

There are several ways of crossing your legs to assume a meditation posture.

1. You can just sit cross legged. This is fine, but you will probably find yourself getting uncomfortable (or your legs falling asleep) fairly quickly.
2. Burmese style. this is the best selection for new meditators. Instead of crossing your legs, one leg rests in front of the other. The sole of the front foot tends to rest against the shin of the other leg. Knees touching the floor.
3. Half lotus. Requires slightly more flexibility. One foot is lifted up to rest on the thigh of the other leg.

4. Full lotus. Everyone has seen this one. Both feet rest on thigh of opposite leg. Requires a high degree of flexibility but is a very stable posture.

Kneeling:

Some people prefer to sit in the kneeling position. You can scrunch up a cushion or turn it on its side and straddle it between your legs as you kneel.



Full Lotus

Half Lotus

Burmese



On a stool

Seiza

On a Chair

Sitting on a chair.

If sitting on the floor is not your cup of tea, or you just do not have the flexibility right now to sit cross legged, sitting in a chair is perfectly good.

Sit slightly forward on the chair with your back away from the backrest. Legs slightly apart with feet flat on the floor.

Instructions for posture:

This is the most important part. Practice sitting in your chosen posture with attention to the following elements.

Body and mind are closely connected, so as you assume this position it will become associated with the state of improved mindfulness. Conversely as you become more aware, you will become more aware of any changes in your posture.

1. **Back.** Back straight but not ridged. Most meditation teachers will emphasise the importance of correct spinal posture. I think the easiest way to set your back is to imagine a thin elastic cord attached to the crown of your head and running up to the ceiling. Now imagine that the cord is pulling upwards, lifting your body into a relaxed, erect position.
2. **Eyes.** Eyes remain open. This is important. If you close your eyes you are likely to drift off to sleep. Instead look downwards at a single point around 3 feet in front of you.
You do not want to be staring, but have a relaxed 'soft focus'.
3. **Mouth.** Lips gently touching or slightly apart. Relaxed mouth. Tip of tongue just touches up behind the back of your front teeth.

4. **Hands.** Hands rest palm down on your thighs.
Or you can rest them in your lap. Palms up with the fingers of your left hand resting on top of the fingers of your right hand. Thumbs are simply relaxed, or you can have them gently touching...so you form an egg shape.

That's all there is to it.



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Day 1.

We are ready to commit to our first mindfulness meditation practice.

You might like to first read back and review the benefits these exercises will have on your professional nursing life.

Read through the following instructions and think them over before beginning your session.

Practice #1. (time = 5 minutes).

Do not worry about the way you are doing this first sitting too much. We will be exploring it in more detail and refining it over the coming sessions.

The idea today is just to keep it simple and to complete it.

1. Set your timer for 5 minutes.

Remember. You are making a commitment to stick with this exercise until the timer sounds.

No matter how interesting or boring or stupid or overwhelming you find it. You are committing to stay on your seat until the timer sounds.

2. Take a few moments to settle into your chosen sitting posture.

You will need a quiet place where you will not be disturbed for the duration of the exercise.

Check your posture: back erect but not ridged. Eyes open with a soft focus looking at a point about 3 feet in front of you.

Relaxed mouth with tip of tongue resting behind upper front teeth. Hands palm down on thighs or palm up cupped in your lap.

3. Start your timer.....

Awareness of the breath:

Become aware of your natural breathing. Experience the sensations and tides of the breath.

Do not try to control the rate or depth of your breath. Let it lead you. Just be aware of the sensations of your breath going in and out.

Pay attention to the rise and fall of your chest and the movement of your abdomen as you breathe.

Awareness of thoughts:

It is likely that shortly after beginning this session you are going to have some thoughts.

Whats on TV?

I feel hungry.

Geez I bet I look a bit stupid doing this.

Once you have this first thought it quickly hooks onto another thought, and then another and off you go, planning, thinking, worrying, fantasising. Following your thoughts.

Instead, as soon as you are aware you are off thinking about stuff, simply say to yourself “thinking” and bring your mind back to focusing on the breath (this is called labelling your thoughts).

Do not try to suppress or stop your thoughts or get frustrated because you keep wandering off in thought before realising it.

Meditation is not about stopping your thoughts. And it is not about following them.

Meditation is about noticing your thoughts and then returning your awareness to the breath.

It is likely that you will wander off with your thoughts many times during this session and that is OK.

This is a gentle process:

- Focus on the breath.
- Become aware when you have drifted off on a thought journey.
- Label the thoughts by saying to yourself “thinking.” Just one word.
- Return your awareness to your breath.

That is all there is too it.

5 minutes.

Once you have finished. Take a moment to congratulate yourself.



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Day 2.

Today another short easy meditation sitting.
Read through the following instructions before you begin.

Prepare yourself and your space just as you did yesterday.
You might like to read over yesterdays sitting exercise again, just to check the instructions for posture and for following the breath.

Today as you focus on your breath, be aware of its movement in and out of your body. When we are stressed or anxious we tend to breathe from the upper chest in short *staccato* or *truncated* breaths.

When we are relaxed, our breathing comes from the abdomen and tends to be more full and tidal.

As you settle into your sitting, place your focus on your abdomen and 'feel' your breath from here.

As you inspire your abdomen expands, and it is as if your breath pours down into it.

Then, as the inspiration continues the chest rises and the lungs are also filled.

As you expire, air is not forced out of the lungs, but rather, it naturally flows out as the abdomen and chest return to their resting position.

There may be a pause before the next breath. Or the next breath may follow immediately.

Occasionally your abdomen and lungs may spontaneously take a much larger breath with a long 'sighing' expiration.

Just be attentive to the patterns.

Again, do not force the breath to be a particular way. If your experience of the breath is not as I have described, just sit with it the way it is and notice it.

Do not try and slow your breathing (this will happen naturally), let the breath set its own tempo.

As soon as you notice you have drifted off on some storyline of thoughts, simply label them "thoughts", and return to awareness of the breath.

Practice #2. (time = 5 minutes).

1. Set your meditation timer for 5 minutes.
2. Take a few moments to check your posture.
3. Begin.



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Day 3.

Today will be a slightly challenging meditation sitting.
Read through the following instructions before you begin.

If you have been following this mindfulness program, today will be your third session of meditation.

The last two sessions have been 5 minutes in duration. Today we are going to increase that to 10 minutes.

10 minutes is a good minimum time for a meditation sitting. It gives you enough time to settle in to your posture, become aware of your breathing, and then spend some developing/experiencing a mindfulness of your breath.

Just like any new exercise or activity, this whole mediation thing may still seem uncomfortable and awkward to you. But I encourage you to persist.

Meditation is kind of like walking through a fine mist or fog. You don't really realise anything is happening at all, but before too long you are soaked by it.

Instructions for today's session are the same as for yesterday. Remember once you begin you are making a commitment to sit until your timer sounds.

Focus your awareness on your breath as you did yesterday. Label any thoughts that arise and return to your breath. You may notice thoughts arising (especially around the 5 minute mark) such as:

This is really getting boring.
Is the 10 minutes up yet?
My leg/back/head is uncomfortable
Is the 10 minutes up YET?

This is perfectly normal. And will get a whole lot easier as you develop your practice. Simply label this as "thinking" each time it arises and return your experience to your breathing. Even if it is 100 times.

Dealing with pain and discomfort.

Once you start sitting for more than 5 minutes you are likely to begin experiencing discomfort (if you haven't already). Your knees may begin to ache, your legs may fall asleep, your back may begin to feel stiff and sore.

These sensations are to be expected and, in fact, are part of the meditation practice. This is how to manage them:

1. **Experience the discomfort.** Remain focused on your breathing, but also open your awareness to the discomfort or pain. Explore what exactly what these sensations are without judgement.
Where are they located?
How do you experience them? And by that I mean how do these sensations actually feel without you attaching thinking around them. Do the sensations change once you settle your awareness on them?
Remember: once you go of on some storyline about your discomfort, label it “thinking”, and return to your breath and your non-judgemental experience of the discomfort.
2. **Change your position.** If the pain becomes distracting or escalating. Remain focused on your breath and change your position. For example, if you feel your legs going to sleep, uncross them or stretch them out for a few minutes.
3. **Listen to sensations of pain.** If you are experiencing pain rather than discomfort you may need to select another posture such as sitting in a chair or using cushions for extra support.
I will be discussing some simple stretching exercises that may help with your sitting posture soon.

Practice #3. (time = 10 minutes).

Set your meditation timer for 10 minutes.

Take a few moments to check your posture.

Begin.

It is fantastic that you have now well and truly embarked on a path of developing improved mindfulness.

As I have said mindfulness is not all about meditation. But it is an important component of it. So we are spending a little time developing this skill. Shortly we will move into ways to apply some other mindfulness practices into your clinical nursing practice.

That is three days of sitting now. I think you deserve a little treat now?



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Day 4.

Today we will be doing a slightly different practice. It is known as The Body Scan. I have modified it slightly to be a little easier for nurses to relate to.

Read carefully through all the following instructions before you begin.

You do not need to remember every detail, but by reading right through you will get the general idea of how this exercise should be done.

Do not hurry.

Practice #4. (time = approx. 10 minutes).

1. Chose a position in which to perform your scan. You might like to lay on your back on a mat or rug on the floor. Or perhaps you would prefer to lay on your bed. Arms by your side. Legs slightly apart.

Choose a place where you will be undisturbed and comfortable.

No timer is required.

2. Take a few moments to place your awareness on your breath as if you were going to settle into your meditation session. The intention of this exercise is not to feel any particular way. You may feel more relaxed or calm, you may fall asleep. The intention is to bring your awareness to sensations and experiences as you focus attention on each part of your body in turn.
3. When you are ready: imagine that you are about to pass feet first through a large CAT scanner. This is the scanner of attention and as its beam passes upwards across your body it will focus your awareness on each particular 'slice' of your body. Unlike a real CT scanner this one is completely silent, and you will not move. It will move up and around you. You may scan your body at any speed you wish. The slower you scan, the clearer the 'image' you will experience.
4. Take a focused breath and the scan begins....
5. As your toes and feet move into the primary beam, become aware of any sensations you are feeling there. Warmth, movement, heaviness, lightness, tingling, or perhaps no sensation at all.
6. Now your ankles and calves pass into the scan. Feel the actual line or boundary of attention as it moves slowly up the body. Notice any pressure, or pulsating. Notice the temperature.
7. The scan continues to move slowly upwards over your knees. Your awareness notices the whole circumference of your

knees, the front, the back and internal sensations. Upwards over your thighs and the backs of your legs. Bring awareness to the large muscles of your quads.

8. The beam moves up over your pelvis, and now also the tips of your fingers. Notice any movements or tingling or other sensations in your fingers and hand.

As the beam continues to move upwards, bring this focused attention to the 'slice' of your body passing through it. your abdomen & forearms, chest, shoulders, neck.

9. Pay particular attention as you head moves into the scan. Sensations of tension in the jaw.

Are the teeth touching or clenched? How do the muscles of the face and lips and around the eyes feel?

10. Once you have completed your scan, spend a few moments to now open the focus of the beam to experience the entirety of the body you have just scanned.

11. How is your experience of your body now compared to before you began?

Rest in those sensations for a few breaths.

12. When you are ready, open your eyes and you are done.



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Day 5.

Today's practice is a 10 minute meditation.

As you are developing some consistency in your sittings now, a few things may be happening:

Regular commitment to incorporating a short period of meditation will change it from a task, into a habit and eventually to a trait. Simply a part of what you do.

Realistically this will take a few weeks of sustained effort yet, but you may already be seeing a shift in your relationship to sitting each day.

Your experience during sitting practice will begin to change. You may have experiences of frustration. That *this is just stupid & nothing is happening* & your body is just uncomfortable. These are just more thoughts. Label them "thoughts" and return to your breath. **You see? There is no escape** (this is why meditation is so simple.... yet so very tough to do).

You may have occasional moments where something deeper happens and you find everything suddenly become spacious and vivid and immediate.

This is usually a brief glimpse as we tend to quash such experiences by immediately going off on thought-stories about how cool this is etc.

Just return to your breath.

You may notice some effects from your sitting beginning to peep out in your work life. We will talk more about this soon.

Practice #5. (time = approx. 10 minutes).

1. Set your timer for 10 minutes.
2. Settle into your posture.
3. Begin.



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Day 6.

Today's practice is a short reflection followed by a 9 minute guided meditation.

Practice #6. (time = approx. 15 minutes).

Take a few moments to reflect on the following questions. Don't think about what the correct answers *should* be.

Think about how you actually experience these situations most of the time.

- I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until some time later.
- I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else.
- I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present.
- I tend to walk quickly to get where I'm going without paying attention to what I experience along the way.
- I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension or discomfort until they really grab my attention.

- I forget a person's name almost as soon as I've been told it for the first time.
- It seems I am "running on automatic," without much awareness of what I'm doing.
- I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.
- I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I'm doing right now to get there.
- I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing.
- I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time.
- I drive places on 'automatic pilot' and then wonder why I went there.
- I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past.
- I find myself doing things without paying attention.
- I snack without being aware that I'm eating

If you would like to have a more concrete score estimating your current level of mindfulness, you might like to take the following online questionnaire. It will take around 5 mins to complete:

Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire: <http://www.awakemind.org/quiz.php>

The questionnaire is based on a study of five independently developed mindfulness questionnaires. It looks at five factors that appear to represent elements of mindfulness as it is currently conceptualised:

- observing
- describing
- acting with awareness
- non-judging of inner experience
- non-reactivity to inner experience.



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Day 7.

Meditation is a practice to develop an improved awareness of the here and now. A non-judgemental experience of the present moment, set aside from the usual mental chatter that we are constantly entertaining in our heads.

Mindfulness is the application of this awareness to the rest of our life. Not just short moments that we are sitting on a cushion or a chair.

We are now going to look at some exercises that will gently introduce some of the mindfulness you are growing in your meditation sessions into specific situations within your work environment.

To do this, I will give you a series of triggers.

Triggers are events or physical actions that will remind you to cultivate a state of present centred awareness. By using awareness of your breath to link back to those mind and body states that you experience during your meditation practice and

then opening these states to include your current environment and activities.

Trigger: washing your hands.

Washing our hands is something we, as nurses, do many many times during the shift.

For a few moments we are away from all the rush and pressure as we stand alone at the sink moving our hands under the water. It is one of the few moments during a typical shift that we are not in motion (at least not physically). This is a great opportunity to touch base with our state of mind and settle into the experience of mindfulness.

1. As you step up to wash your hands take a deep breath. Hand-washing is now a trigger to quiet your mind of all the thoughts racing around up there in your nurse head, and focus on this particular task.
2. During the process of hand washing focus on your breath, just as you do during your meditation session. Again, the goal is not to slow or control you breath, but simply to become aware of it. To *inhabit* it. Check that you are breathing down into your abdomen. Not just shallow breathing into the top of your chest.
3. Open your awareness to the sensations of the water on you hands. Experience its temperature, its slipperiness, the sensations as it tumbles amongst your fingers and over your hands.
4. Feel the soap as you apply it and lather it into your hands. Be aware of the sensations of contact between your hands and

fingers and they interlace and rub against each other. Inhabit the feelings down in your fingers and hands as they move.

5. Maintain awareness of your breath throughout. If you want a specific guide on this, you want to be concentrating about 30% on your breath and 70% on the awareness of the hand-washing.
6. Continue to cultivate awareness as you rinse your hands and dry them. Really get into the whole activity.
7. As you finish drying your hands, complete the exercise by returning your awareness to focus on your breath.
8. Now return to your clinical activity. Done.

Practice #7. (time = 15 minutes).

Today I would like to stretch your daily meditation session out to 15 minutes.

At work today practice the hand-washing trigger.

- Set your timer for 15 minutes.
- Commit to remaining on your chair or cushion until the timer sounds. Begin.
- Once you have completed your session, spend a few moments reminding yourself that during today's shift **every hand wash will be a trigger to practice this hand-wash mindfulness exercise.**

That is going to be a lot of exercises! Good luck.



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Day 8.

Today's practice is to perform the body scan and commit to developing a state of mindfulness at work with each trigger of washing your hands.

Practice #8. (time = approx. 15 minutes).

Today, repeat the Body Scan exercise. Take it nice and slow.

Exercise: mindfulness during hand-washing.

As many times as you can today, use the trigger of washing your hands to focus on a mindful state. Go back and read Day 7 as a reminder.

1. As you step up to wash your hands take a deep breath.
2. During the process of hand washing focus on your breath, just as you do during your meditation session.

3. Check that you are breathing down into your abdomen. Not just shallow breathing into the top of your chest.
4. Open your awareness to the sensations of the water on you hands, and of the environment.
5. Maintain awareness of your breath throughout.
6. As you finish drying your hands, complete the exercise by returning your awareness to focus on your breath.
7. Now return to your clinical activity. Done.



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Day 9.

Today's practice is a big ask.

I am going to steal your entire next meal break to do an eating practice.

Normally our meal breaks are rushed, squashed into a limited space amongst the turmoil of the shift. We come into the tearoom all hyped up, and shovel the food into our mouth in case we get called back onto the floor.

Nurses are renowned for eating their meals this way. Even when we are not at work.

Trigger: eating your meal.

So the trigger for this mindfulness exercise is your meal break at work. You do not have to do this every day. Sometimes the most appropriate and re-energising thing to do during your break is to sit amongst friends, blow off a little steam, reflect on the shift. Expunge a little gossip, ventilate your stress and laugh. A lot.

But I am asking you to just try this maybe once, maybe twice a week.

Serve it up.

With the full strangle sleeper squeeze that shift work applies to our lives, it is not always possible to find enough time to prepare our own meals to take to work every day.

But for this exercise try to pack a healthy meal to take to work. Getting out your packed lunch will remind you to do the exercise.

Set the space.

If you try to do this exercise amidst a table crowded with colleagues in full lunchtime shenanigans, it will not be long before they are looking at you a little strangely.

Find a quiet space to practice mindful eating, perhaps outside if it is a nice day, or perhaps at a quiet table in the cafeteria.

Slow it down.

Pause before the beginning of your meal. Most of the time our eating mode is Gobble, Gulp and Go. Each mouthful of food races to beat the previous one past your uvula. Sometimes it succeeds.

Incoming food is shovelled in past exiting conversation as we flip hurriedly through that trashy magazine on the table. Flip. Flip. Flip. You know what I am talking about right?

Well not today.

This time, take a moment to begin your mindful meal by first pausing to take it all in with your senses. Notice the colours, and varieties of food. Notice the smells, the fragrance. Notice how your body (in particular your mouth and your stomach) responds to the imminence of your meal.

Eat each mouthful as if it were your last meal.

Once you put a serve of food into your mouth put down the fork or the chopsticks or whatever.

Now chew slowly and open to what is going on in your mouth. Experience the flavours. Chew a couple of times more than you normally would and then swallow. Follow the food down.

Now you can pick up your fork and mindfully place another mouthful, before setting it down again.

This may all sound a little strange, but remember it is an exercise. And once you really get into it, it can actually be a very pleasant experience.

If you find your thoughts drifting off to work related stuff, or any other stuff for that matter, label them “thoughts” just as you do when doing your meditation exercise. Then bring your attention back to the smorgasbord of sensations and experiences as you eat.

Drink slowly.

Don't gulp down your drink.

Drink slowly.

Maybe even hold the liquid in your mouth for a moment before swallowing it. Let the next in-breath wash the taste across your tongue.

Thats it. Once you have finished your meal (and in reality it won't take as long as it sounds) spend a few moments to simmer in the relaxed, focused and attentive state you have eaten in.....and then return to your work.

Oh, and for the rest of the shift do not forget to engage with the hand-washing exercise.



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Day 10.

Today we are going to add another trigger. An activity that will prompt you to practice a few moments of mindfulness. To re-inhabit your body and pay attention, non-judgementally to the sensations and experiences you are soaking in.

As nurses, we find ourselves answering the telephone many many times during any given shift.

On a typical busy unit the sound of a phone demanding to be answered is often an unwelcome interruption to the long list of tasks we are already trying to rush through.

In honesty, how often do you find yourself really not wanting to answer the phone because you just know the person on the other end is going to want you to do something that will significantly interrupt the task you were just doing (a task that was itself an interruption to your original list of things-to-do)?

Conversely, how often are you making a call to another area only to be answered by someone who obviously has their mind on 5 other things?

Trigger: answering the phone.

Just take a moment on your next shift to notice how often you can hear the sound of a phone ringing. Like washing your hands, answering the phone offers a frequently occurring opportunity to bring mindfulness into your work.

Each time you are going to answer a phone:

1. Step up to the phone and pause. Take two slow breaths.
2. During these breaths become aware of your body and its sensations just as you do in the hand-washing exercise.
3. As you pick up the phone: focus. You are going to give your full, undivided attention to the person on the line. Consider some of the points listed below under Telephone Etiquette as part of this exercise.
4. During the conversation maintain focus on really listening to what the other person is saying. Also, have some awareness of your own posture and your breath.
5. When speaking be mindful of your speech. Slow it down a little more than feels natural (don't worry to the person on the other end it will not sound slow at all).

6. After completing the call, be aware as you place the handset gently down onto the phone. That completes your exercise. Simple.

The first component [of mindfulness] involves the self-regulation of attention so that it is maintained on immediate experience, thereby allowing for increased recognition of mental events in the present moment. The second component involves adopting a particular orientation toward one's experiences in the present moment, an orientation that is characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance.

– Scott Bishop⁴.

Telephone Etiquette.

When taking a call:

Focus your attention on the caller: Do not try to continue those other 3 simultaneous conversations, as well as stuffing that last chocolate left over from night duty down your mouth.

Engage your phone voice: Most telephone conversations in the hospital are going to involve communication of important high-value information. We want to place this conversation in an environment that will optimise the quality of communication. Take a deep breath from your diaphragm before you begin to speak.

Smile. This changes everything.

Make a conscious effort to slow your speaking pace down from your normal speed. And try to drop your voice a semi-tone. This can feel quite awkward and even artificial, but makes a huge difference in clarity to the person on the other end of the line.

⁴ Mindfulness: A Proposed Operational Definition – Bishop – 2006 – Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice – Wiley Online Library [Internet]. [cited 2013 Nov 28]. Available from: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1093/clipsy.bph077/abstract>

Answer in full: When someone calls, they want to know straight away if they are speaking to the right person in the right place. Do not just say *hello*. Give your greeting. State the area you are working in, your occupation, and your surname. If you are working in a key position, for example, unit manager, you should state that too.

Listen: Take in not only what the caller is saying, but see if you can pick up on any non verbal cues as well.

Be prepared: to write stuff down.

Seek clarification: If the caller is giving you important information, repeat your understanding back to them.

"OK John, confirming.....Mr Bradfield's ward allocation has been changed from 11B to 10A."

Take ownership of the call: If you are going to transfer the call to another extension, tell the person where you are going to send them and if possible give them a 'plan B' in case the call is lost (eg give them the number for the main switchboard, or take their number so you are able to call them back).

If you are going to put them on hold, assure them that you are going to find the person/information and get back to them. Give them a realistic idea of how long this might take.

Identify the caller: If you are going to find the person for whom the call is intended, find out who the caller is: "May I ask who is calling please?"

Practice #10. (time = 15–20 minutes)

Today I would like to ask you to finally stretch your daily meditation session out to 20 minutes.

20 minutes is an ideal minimum time to practice a mindfulness meditation session.

It gives you time to settle in and check with your posture before absorbing yourself in the meditation for a beneficial period.

1. Set your timer for 20 minutes.
2. Commit to remaining on your chair or cushion until the timer sounds.
3. Begin.
4. Once you have completed your session, spend a few moments reminding yourself that during today's shift every hand wash AND every telephone call will be a trigger to practice your mindfulness exercises.

Remember: the trick with doing your mindfulness exercises at work is remembering to remember!

Epilogue.

I hope you have found this introduction to the practice of mindfulness useful, and that it has encouraged you to engage with growing a regular practice of your own.

If you have any suggestions to improve this program, or you have any other feedback, please contact me at ian@thenursepath.com

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