

Proven Benefits of Mindfulness with Research Sources

by Julie Fraser, Present Source

Why is mindfulness increasingly gaining traction as a path to wellness?

Because research shows its many benefits... To health, to happiness, to productivity.

This is a very brief overview of the benefits of mindfulness. Practice is the best way to understand and experience these benefits directly. However, to allow you to be confident that the effort of practice is worth your time, this overview points to selected research studies that document and prove these benefits.

First, two definitions of mindfulness:

1. Mindfulness is non-judgmental present moment awareness.
2. Mindfulness is paying attention on purpose to what is true at each given moment without categorizing things as good or bad, just allowing them to be and accepting what is.

What are the proven, researched benefits of mindfulness? It can reduce problems in each of these areas:

Stress: Mindfulness does not push aside stress, pain, or challenging feelings; rather it creates an awareness of those and encourages witnessing those rather than getting carried away by them. Mindfulness also fosters non-judgment and an acceptance of things as they are. This shift in mindset typically allows people to feel less distress from stressful situations. People practicing mindfulness regularly had a reduced effect of psychological stress compared to the control group. (Research list #1)

Decision making: The mindfulness practice of being fully in the present moment and acknowledging what is currently true without judgment (pulling your thoughts away from the past and future) not only speeds up decision-making by avoiding analysis paralysis, it makes the decision more rational. For example, people are less likely to keep investing in a hopeless project if they practice even 15 minutes of mindfulness. (Research list #2) Continuing to invest in a hopeless project is called the sunk-cost bias, and happens when you are so conscious of the investments you've already made in something you can't bring yourself to stop investing in it. Clearly this is not a good bias for decisions.

Productivity: Clearly one way to waste time is to be stuck focused on the past or dreaming about the future. By staying anchored in the present moment, employees can be more productive for the current task at hand. This is particularly important in dynamic work environments where conditions and needs may change frequently, requiring employees to respond effectively and not in a rote way. (Research #3) What is interesting is that when their supervisors practice mindfulness, it also has a

positive impact on employee job performance (Research list #4) All of the other areas also contribute to productivity.

Employee engagement: When leaders practice mindfulness, they are fully present to the employees. Employees can tell when the supervisor is listening fully; this makes a person feel valued and respected. In addition, when a leader is fully present, they can better understand and empathize with what employees need and how to foster their development. This combination leads to employees' feeling greater job satisfaction and need satisfaction. (Research list #4) This same set of studies shows that employees express better work-life balance and less emotional exhaustion if their supervisor practices mindfulness. Employees who practice mindfulness are also proven more likely to be engaged at work. (Research list #5)

Creativity: Innovation relies on people coming up with new and creative ideas – whether for products, processes, partnerships, ways to communicate, or ways to add value to customers. Mindfulness may be practiced as non-selective awareness: being receptive to all the thoughts and sensations experienced without focusing attention on any particular concept or object. This form of mindfulness bolsters thinking outside the box and generating new ideas. (Research list #6) One of the foundational tenants of mindfulness is “beginners mind” in which you strive to start with a clean slate and see things afresh.

Teamwork: At the core of working in a team is having compassion and empathy. Not everyone on a team is likely to see eye-to-eye, so having the ability to be open to someone else is a foundation for success. Mindfulness also allows people to see both themselves and others from a more detached “witness” perspective. This can enable people to want to help each other, and mindfulness practitioners are more likely to do just that. (Research list #7)

Health: Healthcare costs can be significant, and mindfulness has proven benefits on a wide range of medical conditions. I can't begin to list them all here, but the mind-body connection is strong. More and more companies such as Google, SAP, General Mills, and Aetna Insurance offer mindfulness as part of employee wellness programs. Duke and Northeastern Universities studied the benefits at Aetna and found a seven per cent drop in healthcare costs, and an additional 69 minutes of productivity each day when 14% of employees offered the option participated in mindfulness programs.

Communication: How often do you find in a conversation you are focused not on what the other person is saying, but on what you want to say next? Mindful communication is all about listening fully and openly, with empathy. Then, taking time to decide what to say on the basis of that. Or possibly deciding not to respond at all, but rather to re-state what you think you heard and then being open to them correcting your misunderstandings. You will be more comfortable with silence when it is right for a conversation. Then when you respond, it is with that fully in mind, choosing words carefully and detaching from any feelings behind it. Conflict resolution and non-violent communications require you to be mindful and present as a foundation.

Change: One of the largest challenges companies face today is the speed of change. Often our mindsets get stuck in ways of doing things that are familiar or have worked in the past, but are no longer optimal – unless we are truly able to notice we are doing that. Self-observation is a key skill that mindfulness improves; by being in the present moment and witnessing ourselves, we are not as likely to assume that previous experience is correct. (Research list #8)

Research List

1. MA Rosenkranz, RJ Davidson, DG MacCoon, JF Sheridan, NH Kalin, A Lutz, *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity* 2013:27:174-184 Cited in Full Catastrophe Living Revised and Updated Edition 2013 by Kabat-Zinn Jon
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<http://pss.sagepub.com/content/25/2/369.abstract>; cited in Inc. Magazine Feb 2015 <http://www.inc.com/ilya-pozin/can-mindfulness-improve-your-productivity.html>
3. Erik Dane, Bradley Brummel, *Examining workplace mindfulness and its relations to job performance and turnover intention*, *Human Relations* January 2014 vol. 67 no. 1 105-128
<http://hum.sagepub.com/content/67/1/105>
4. Jochen Reb, Jayanth Narayanan, Sankalp Chaturvedi Leading Mindfully: Two Studies on the Influence of Supervisor Trait Mindfulness on Employee Well-Being and Performance 2-2014
http://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4319&context=lkcsb_research
5. Franziska Depenbrock, Being mindfully aware and engaged at work? The role of affect regulative processes for the relationship between daily levels of mindfulness and work engagement
http://www.innovatiefinwerk.nl/sites/innovatiefinwerk.nl/files/field/bijlage/depenbrock_6015145_mt_wo.pdf
6. Lorenza S. Colzato, Ayca Ozturk, Bernhard Hommel. **Meditate to Create: The Impact of Focused-Attention and Open-Monitoring Training on Convergent and Divergent Thinking.** *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2012; 3 DOI: [10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00116](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00116) – abstract <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/04/120419102317.htm>
7. David DeSteno, Northeastern University *Meditation Increases Compassionate Responses to Suffering* Aug 2013 *Psychological Science* <http://pss.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/08/21/0956797613485603> referenced in this overview <http://www.northeastern.edu/cos/2013/04/release-can-meditation-make-you-a-more-compassionate-person/>
8. Siegel, D. J. (2007a). *The mindful brain: Reflection and attunement in the cultivation of well-being*. New York: Norton. http://www.drdansiegel.com/books/the_mindful_brain/

Mindfulness Websites with Additional Resources

The research on the benefits of mindfulness is extensive and growing every month. This is a partial list of sites that point to mindfulness research.

American Mindfulness Research Association (AMRA)

Founded in 2013, AMRA supports efforts to establish an evidence base for the process, practice, and construct of mindfulness; promote best evidence-based standards for the use of mindfulness research and its applications; and facilitate mindfulness-related dialogue and discovery. <https://goamra.org/> They also publish a newsletter, *Mindfulness Research Monthly* that lists current research in categories and includes research highlights and announcements of events. www.mindfulexperience.org

Mindfulnet.org www.mindfulnet.org

“Everything you need to know about mindfulness on one website” is not far from the truth. This is a website with all things mindful – research listed in categories, where to find courses and teachers, books, information about what mindfulness is and the neuroscience behind it. www.mindfulnet.org

Center for Investigating Healthy Minds (CIHM) at University of Wisconsin-Madison

On this site you can not only find research and articles on the neuroscience of mindfulness, but also register to participate in their studies. <http://www.investigatinghealthyminds.org/cihmScientificPub.html>

Greater Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life at UC-Berkeley

This group puts out a variety of newsletters, videos and podcasts. They also fund and conduct research. www.greatergood.berkeley.edu

The Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Healthcare and Society at UMass Medical School

This center offers a stress-reduction program, education, a conference, and a listing of research. www.umassmed.edu/cfm/index.aspx

Mindful: Taking Time for What Matters

This is a magazine and on-line community that reports on research as well as providing instruction and programs for learning on-line with audio and video. www.mindful.org

The Wellspring Institute for Neuroscience and Contemplative Wisdom

This nonprofit organization offers workshops, articles, videos, slide decks, and lists research under the heading science on its website. It also has a Wiki on Meditation practices. www.wisebrain.org/wellspring-institute