

How Does Practicing Mindfulness Help In Relapse Prevention?

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Practicing mindfulness is among the best tools for alcohol or drug relapse prevention. Whether you're focused on sustaining your recovery from addiction, trauma recovery, or other modes of promoting healing and self-empowerment, cultivating mindfulness can be very effective and *rewarding*.

Topics covered in this blog:

The practice of mindfulness originated in traditional Buddhist strategies of *training one's own mind* to operate healthily and in greater harmony with one's experience of existential reality. Over the generations, fostering the self-discipline of mindfulness has made its way into various Western therapies, due to its demonstrated physical and mental health benefits.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the simple yet challenging mental practice of *being aware* of your own thoughts in the moment and of your experiences of your world and your engagements with it — without judging them. It's about *responding* instead of *reacting* to the occurrences that present themselves to you through the moments and days of your life. It involves a developed skill in tracking one's mental activities, emotional feelings, and physical sensations.

Some important benefits of exercising mindfulness are:

Relief from <u>anxiety</u>	Reduced blood pressure
Lower stress level	Better cardiovascular health
Reduced <u>depression</u>	Decreased chronic pain
Better quality of sleep	Improved mood <u>balance</u>
Elevated work performance	Greater sense of inner peace

Misconceptions of Mindfulness

The point of practicing mindfulness is not to reach a *blank* mental state. On the contrary, it is about being *more* aware, more fully *present*. It is about sharpening one's awareness of moments and thoughts and emotions and sensations. The point is to embrace awareness, not *expel* awareness from the mind. It is an exercise in curiosity about *all* that passes through the consciousness, and in freeing the mind from judgement about any of it.

Although *mindfulness* is a part of various forms of *meditation*, the two are not the *same* thing. Meditation is a dedicated activity, planned and executed, whereas mindfulness is best understood as a developed *way of thinking about your thoughts and experiences as they are occurring*. It's a practice of observing and accepting one's own perceptions of reality in everyday life.

Why Is Mindfulness Hard to Achieve?

Today's social and professional atmosphere can seem like immersion in a state of rapid and constant change. The persistent high energy and sense of perpetual rushing can cause a sense of disequilibrium, often leading to anxiety and even consequences of mental and emotional overload. The relentless daily exposure to it all can be a lot to manage *and* keep a sense of balance, peace, and contentment.

Self-therapeutic focus on building a richer and more objective awareness of one's self and world (mindfulness), along with cultivating a mindset of gratitude involves adopting new ways of thinking. Observing our thoughts and ways of processing our experiences require slowing down enough to experience the present more fully.

That can feel awkward for people who have recently come to practicing mindfulness. Like any other skill, it takes *practice* to master it, and every individual must try some techniques to discover which ones are most effective for him/her. Fortunately, it's fun to do, so it's soothing just to keep *trying* to exercise our own techniques for mindful self-observation.

Even better, there's no possibility of failure while you're *trying* to be mindful. In efforts at mindfulness, trying *is* succeeding. In other words, to *try* to focus on being mindful is what it is to *be* mindful in that moment.

Mindfulness for Help in Trauma Recovery

Moving through life at high speed is a manner of coping for many people struggling with the effects of past trauma. Practicing mindfulness offers an important tool for helping overcome the often long-lasting effects of trauma. Each person can choose a level of practice to imbue daily consciousness with greater mindfulness.

In making the effort toward more mindful living, each person can be anticipated to find and enjoy his/her *own* level and comfortable pace of the practice. It can be as easy as closing your eyes and or just sitting quietly and intentionally *listening to your own thoughts and feelings*, without judging them as they flow through you.

Being mindful is being fully *present* in your environment, being fully *aware* of your mental, emotional, and physical responses to it, and discovering that you are feeling comfortable with yourself.

Mindfulness for Help in Relapse Prevention

Practicing powerful techniques for developing a habit of mindfulness can help people suffering from substance abuse disorder, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues.

One vast value of mindfulness is its effectiveness in a person's efforts toward training his or her own mind to navigate through challenging thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations without reacting to them by practicing unhealthy or even self-destructive behaviors.

An extraordinarily beneficial effect of training one's own mind to sustain a state of increased mindfulness is a greater ability to detect initial signs of relapse risk by observing your own thoughts, emotions, and physical experience.

Practicing awareness of what you are experiencing in these ways can empower you to recognize and respond to early signs of oncoming internal derailing that has led to substance abuse in the past. *Using* your mindfulness this way can be very powerful in helping sustain addiction recovery. It also enables us to show *self-compassion* even if relapse occurs. It further helps a person more adeptly bring himself or herself back out of substance abuse *sooner*, and with even better-developed tools for more lasting success in sobriety going forward.

How Can I Practice Mindfulness?

Practicing mindfulness is a very simple matter of quieting the mind and paying attention to your thoughts as they flow into and out of your mind. It's just observing your thoughts as they come and go. This is what it is to just *be present*, also known as to *live in the moment*. It's a way to inner balance and greater happiness.

Of course, being *simple* doesn't mean it's *easy*. It does take practice to eventually find oneself more automatically maintaining an ongoing state of mindfulness. So, practice for a few minutes each day, until you find it becoming a more frequent habit. Strengthen your newly developing habit by continuing to practice it *intentionally* during times when you find you have drifted out of the mindset.

Continue this process until you find yourself eventually living more continuously in a mindful state. But, mindfulness is naturally an *endeavor* — with progress for those who continue the practice — not a permanent accomplishment. Take comfort in that fact as you embark on an ever-aspiring life-long journey of gently coaxing your mind into greater extents of mindful awareness.

External Aids for Cultivating Mindfulness

Practicing mindfulness can be challenging in our busy lives and fast-paced environment, but we have the benefit of a great wealth of resources for cultivating mindfulness. If it helps, you might try attending organized mindfulness group sessions. There are also abundant group meditation opportunities. Or, just walk, sit, lie down, bike, or do something else that helps you free your consciousness to use the activity for focusing your awareness on all the thoughts and sensations you experience while engaged in it.

Modern technologies offer additional resources for developing mindfulness. For example, you can watch online instructional videos and podcasts offering mindfulness guidance. There are even free apps to aid in meditation, and others for developing and practicing mindfulness.

Pathways Real Life Recovery, Sandy Utah

We are a mental health and addiction recovery treatment center providing inpatient drug rehab, inpatient alcohol rehab, and outpatient treatment in Utah. We help people become healthy throughout the whole person. Our therapists, medical doctors, and other mental health and addiction recovery specialists focus on each individual's value to be nurtured from within, not the outward symptoms.

Our approach is about restructuring beliefs that hold a person hostage to their past, and we help them succeed in loving themselves. We focus on *change from within*. Pathways is well established as one of the best inpatient rehab centers Utah has to offer.

For more information, or to schedule your free assessment and consultation, call Pathways Real Life Recovery, Sandy UT at (801) 895-3006 anytime 24/7, or use our online contact form.
