Here is what you may already know about compassion fatigue:

**Compassion Fatigue**
Compassion fatigue is often coined “the cost of caring” (Figley). It is the physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual depletion or exhaustion that can result when we are repeatedly exposed to another’s pain and suffering. In veterinary medicine this pain and suffering can refer to that of both the patient and the client.

According to *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* **empathy** is defined as:

1. the imaginative projection of a subjective state into an object so that the object appears to be infused with it  
2. the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner; also: the capacity for this

Charles Figley PhD, a pioneer in the field of compassion fatigue states in “Compassion Fatigue in the Animal Care Community” that empathy is a response and a process.

**Compassion** according to *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* is:

sympathetic consciousness of others’ distress together with a desire to alleviate it

Figley points out that compassion while related to empathy is really “a focused empathy, one that is action oriented”. This is an important distinction to make as many thought leaders in the area of compassion fatigue are suggesting we should really call compassion fatigue, empathy fatigue because as with compassion, our desire to alleviate another’s pain and suffering may actually be somewhat protective.

**Professional Quality of Life**

Dr. Beth Hudnall-Stamm and Dr. Charles Figley developed a self-test called the ProQol (Professional Quality of Life) that can be accessed from [www.proqol.org](http://www.proqol.org). This test assesses one’s own levels of secondary trauma, burnout and compassion fatigue.

![Diagram of Professional Quality of Life](image)

**Burnout**
We must now define *burnout* and how it differs from compassion fatigue. Burnout is physical or emotional collapse caused by overwork or stress. It is a work-related issue whereby compassion fatigue is a personal issue. Said another way, it is when the work exceeds the resources. The work we all understand (patient load, appointments, surgeries, etc) but the resources can be anything from time, money, staff, appointment slots, etc.

Burnout results from the work environment itself. If we were to leave that environment and did not go to another with the same lack of resources, we would not be burned out. In contrast, if we are suffering from compassion fatigue and leave a practice to go to another, we will still be suffering from compassion fatigue because it is about who we are, the emotions we are absorbing and how we are perceiving the work and its effects.

**Secondary Trauma**

When we become traumatized by witnessing or hearing about another’s trauma is called *secondary trauma*.

Secondary trauma is also called vicarious trauma and refers to the cumulative transformative effect of working with traumatized individuals. Our view of the world changes. Take animal shelter workers for example. The nature of their work exposes them to some of the worst in humanity as they witness the results of neglect, abuse and disposal of animals. They start to develop a strong disdain for humans and a general hatred toward people. This is the result of vicarious trauma.

**Signs and Symptoms**

Regardless of what terms are used to describe compassion fatigue, the signs and symptoms are very real. While the symptoms can vary among individuals, many include: depression

- hopelessness
- physical and emotional exhaustion
- diminished sense of career enjoyment
- bottled-up emotions
- irritability
- substance abuse

- increases in mistakes
- anxiety
- problems in personal relationships
- isolation
- physical ailments
- suicide

Compassion fatigue is an occupational hazard inherent in veterinary medicine. While it may not be avoidable, it certainly can be managed. We want to provide authentic caring and compassion for our patients and clients but we don’t want to lose ourselves in the process.

How healthy is your practice? Only as healthy as it’s doctors and staff. If they are struggling with compassion fatigue, the organization can suffer in the following ways:

- substandard level of care
- absenteeism
- high turnover
- lack of teamwork
- team conflict
- low morale

- increased cynicism, complaining
- erosion of customer loyalty
- reduced customer satisfaction
- reputation at risk
- poor quality control
- deterioration of the org’s mission
These are costly issues to any organization but especially to veterinary practices. How can we expect our clients to have an exceptional experience at our practice when everyone they interacted with would give their job satisfaction a 2 out of a scale of 10 (10 being the highest)?

**Moral Stress**

*Moral distress* or simply *moral stress* is when our own beliefs and morals conflict with what we are asked to do. For instance the euthanasia due to lack of finances, or the reluctance from a client to continue treatment when the you believe it is what is best for the patient or the euthanasia despite a treatable condition. When we fundamentally disagree with what is being asked of us, yet policies and routines dictate.

According to Dr. Elizabeth Strand, Founding Director of Veterinary Social Work at the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine, moral distress is the biggest contributor to compassion fatigue among veterinarians. For example when one believes the best course of treatment is the one prescribed and yet the client can not afford the treatment or chooses not to do it, moral stress ensues.

**Contributing Factors**

What contributes to compassion fatigue is both plentiful and individual and may include some of the following:

- lack of awareness
- lack of training
- inexperience
- non-compliant clients
- stress of practice
- not being able to forgive oneself for mistakes
- debt
- perfectionistic personality
- lack of healthy coping mechanisms/stress management techniques
- unreasonable expectations by others and of ourselves

**Who is Vulnerable**

Anyone whose work or caregiving puts them in an environment that is emotionally taxing is susceptible to compassion fatigue. When we foster empathy, we are at risk. In addition to veterinary medicine, healthcare workers, mental health providers, eldercare workers, child care advocates, lawyers, jurors, hospice workers and teachers are all vulnerable.
What No One Has Told You

What you don’t know about compassion fatigue is that it’s not about your relationship with your clients, patients or colleagues. It’s about your relationship with yourself.

Compassion fatigue results when we are repeatedly exposed to another’s pain and suffering and we ignore our own needs. We ignore our need for rest, replenishment, rejuvenation, etc. We believe our needs should come last or we just don’t feel worthy enough of even attending to our own needs.

Many veterinarians are struggling with feelings of inadequacy, of not doing/being enough, resentment, fearing failure, guilt, anger, anxiety, self-doubt and not wanting to let others down. These are all thought problems and we choose our thoughts. Of all the thoughts you could choose, why choose ones of fear, inadequacy and self-doubt?

Here’s the thing, feeling confident is just as much of a choice as feeling inadequate. You’ve just gotten really good at thinking thoughts that make you feel inadequate and then you look for evidence to substantiate that belief.

Compassion fatigue is a thought problem. How could you think about it differently? This is where you need to put your energy, not in wishing the clients, patients, co-workers, hospital director, spouse or your mother were different.
Boundaries are the ultimate act of self-love and without them we become ineffective at caring for others. Self-love and self-care are one and the same and without boundaries we can’t effectively take care of ourselves so how can we expect to effectively care for others? Boundaries are a way of not only respecting ourselves but protecting ourselves.

From a physical standpoint our skin is a boundary. Without it our insides would spill all over and we couldn’t function. The same applies to non-physical boundaries. If you know what I will accept and what I won’t accept it changes our entire relationship for the better and improves it’s functionality.

Why We Lack Boundaries

We are people pleasers
- We want everyone to like us and we don’t want to “hurt anyone’s feelings”. Please know that no one has the power to make us feel a certain way. Our feelings come from our thoughts and not the circumstance.
- Ask yourself how is this working being a people pleaser? My bet is that it is not working for you because you end up feeling angry and resentful and asking why no one is thinking about you since you are thinking about everyone else and their needs. Again, it’s your job to meet your own needs, no one else’s.

We lack an understanding of boundaries
- Typically we learn about boundaries from our parents. What did you learn from your mother about boundaries? How about from Dad? When we don’t have an understanding of their importance, we don’t know why we need them.
- You will also find that those that have very poor boundaries will constantly infringe on ours and test ours.

Worthiness
- Many of us come with a “not enough” or “not worthy” tape playing on continuous. Some version of not being good enough or not worthy of having our needs met. We think “who am I to ask people to not text me from work unless it’s a true emergency?”. Who are you NOT to?
- Others of us don’t feel comfortable standing up for ourselves but if we don’t others will see how far they can infiltrate our space. Boundaries prevent this.

Self-esteem and confidence
- Enforcing boundaries is not easy and requires patience, diligence and practice but consider the possibility that it’s these exact boundaries that will help build both your self-esteem and confidence.

Where Do We Begin?

Boundaries are about US, not the other person. What’s ok with you and what’s not ok with you. Boundaries are not about trying to manipulate other people and getting them to do or not do certain things.

Instead a boundary is, if you do THIS, then I will do THAT.

“If you yell at me, I will leave the room.”
“If you ask for my cell phone number, I will not give it to you.”
“If you text me pictures of your dog, I will not respond.”
“If you show up at my house unannounced, I will not open the door.”

1. **Start small**
   - Find little things to start with such as telling friends you turn your phone on do-not-disturb at 9pm and that you won’t be answering texts after that time. Sure you will likely have to remind them, that’s what it means to enforce boundaries. Once you get good at setting and enforcing small boundaries, then you can move to larger ones like setting boundaries with co-workers, clients and family, etc.

2. **Use a mantra**
   - Brené Brown, a research professor at University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work and author of the two #1 New York Times bestselling books *The Gifts of Imperfection* and *Daring Greatly*, uses the mantra “Choose discomfort over resentment” to remind herself to not be pulled into saying Yes when she really wants to say No.

3. **Practice, practice, practice**
   - Start saying aloud (alone or to others) what it is you want to say. The more you become comfortable setting and enforcing your boundaries, the easier it will be.

   “That sounds interesting but I cannot make it”
   “No I’m not available.”
   “I wish I could go but I can’t. Thanks for asking though.”
   “No, my plate is already full.”
   “Thanks for the invite. My weekend plans are to be with my family so I won’t be able to attend.”
   “No I cannot work on that day, I already made plans.”


A key takeaway from the video is when she states, “Empathy minus boundaries is not empathy. Compassion minus boundaries is not genuine…” . She goes against the current belief that empathy can lead to burnout. Instead she feels that “empathy is not about feeling for someone but feeling with someone”. And in this way empathy actually can give back, tenfold.

Compassion fatigue has also been called empathy fatigue but I believe it is when we get lost in feeling for others (rather than with them) combined with not having clear boundaries that we make ourselves vulnerable and drastically increase our chances for compassion fatigue.

The most compassionate people are also the most boundaried.

Look for where in your life you are feeling angry, resentful, overwhelmed and/or frustrated. Chances are those are the areas you need to create and enforce some boundaries.
So What Does Self-Care Really Mean and Why Is It Essential to Your Career?
Julie Squires, CCFS

In order to provide care to another being in a sustainable way, we have to take care of ourselves first. This is not intuitive to anyone in a caregiving role.

When we put ourselves last on the list why are we surprised when we are stressed, anxious, depressed, depleted or feeling exhausted? It is our job to meet our needs, no one else’s. We can’t wait for others in our life to tell us to take a day for ourselves or go for a walk, that responsibility falls in our hands. We need to ask for what we need, unapologetically.

Human beings have 9 universal needs:
Sustenance/Health
Safety/Security
Rest
Autonomy/Authenticity
Creativity/Play
Meaning/Contribution
Love/Caring
Empathy/Understanding
Community/Belonging

Can you identify needs that are not being met in your life? Most of us can and that is ok. The question is what can you do to fulfill those needs?

What is required is that we realize the extent to which the work is traumatizing is the extent to which we need to balance it with self-initiated action aimed at meeting our needs. This is not something we can ignore or hope will go away.

If you live with others, what do you need to ask for in order to take care of yourself? If you live alone, what is one thing you can start doing daily for yourself? None of this has to be very time-consuming, finding 10-20 mins/day to gift yourself is often enough.

What Get’s in the Way
The most common reason for not attending to ourselves is that we believe it is selfish. Being selfish is when we care only for and about ourselves. That is not at all what self-care is.

Self-care is any self-initiated activity or behavior that results in balancing our emotional and physical stressors. It is not to be confused with consumerism or self-indulgence. Self-care

How You Start Your Day Matters
Many of the personal development thought leaders of our time have one consistency and that is they all have a very intentional morning routine in order to set their day up for success.
So What Does Self-Care Really Mean and Why Is It Essential to Your Career?

Julie Squires, CCFS

For me it involves excellent coffee, real food, meditation and exercise. Sometimes my exercise even becomes my meditation but it’s a non-negotiable. I. Do. It. Every. Morning. Sustenance and health are enormous needs of mine that I honor every day.

So this means sometimes I have to wake up earlier depending on my travel schedule or what I’m doing that particular day. I do it anyway. Because I know that it will dramatically improve the quality of my mind, body and soul for that day. I’ll be better able to serve those I care for and feel better about myself.

When the start of your day is consistently filled with chaos, and then we go to work in the often unpredictable world of veterinary medicine, you can easily see how we can set ourselves up for failure. Failure in our well-being and emotional state.

Be a Rebel

I’m asking you to break out of the traditional box of caregivers and practice giving to yourself. Be rebellious and stare down martyrdom. Don’t be surprised when the mind chatter comes up because it inevitably will. There will always be something else you should be doing other than gifting to yourself. Do it anyway.

A veterinarian who had attended one of my workshops recently told me that she had starting honoring her need for creativity/play by taking a weekly painting class, something that she once really enjoyed and had decided to give to herself once again. She told of how she fights with herself every week about it. Her mind will say things like, You shouldn’t go, you have so much laundry to do. But instead of giving in to the non-truth spouting monkey mind, she pushes back and decides “No, this is something I’m doing for myself that I really enjoy and that makes me feel good when I do it. The laundry isn’t going anywhere.”

We all have that mind chatter and the best thing you can do with it is:
1. Anticipate it
Expect that the mind will try to derail you from your efforts. Anticipate it ahead of time and think about what you will tell yourself when your mind tries to talk you out of going for that walk, doing yoga, enjoying a cup of tea outside or reading a book for pleasure.

2. Acknowledge it
I literally say “Oh I see you!” or “Oh you again!” to my mind chatter. I know I am not my mind so when I recognize my mind trying to talking me out of what is in my best interest I just smile and acknowledge it. I don’t attach to it or believe it but let it know I see it.

3. Answer it (in a way that best serves you)
This is where we can decide to think differently. Many just believe the initial mind chatter and never dream of answering it from the heart. No, I need to and deserve to have some time to
So What Does Self-Care Really Mean and Why Is It Essential to Your Career?
Julie Squires, CCFS

myself. This will become much easier the more you do so don’t give in to your old way of thinking.
You’ve been given the rare gift of being able to aid in the healing of others, animals and people. You’ve made a difference in more lives than you will ever know. If you too believe you have a gift, then please honor, cherish, nurture and feed it.

Self-Care Ideas

• going for a photo walk
• going to the forest
• a bath at the end of the day
• going for bike rides
• finding overgrown grass and putting my bare feet in it
• lying in the grass on the hill and staring up at the sky
• cooking a meal for myself and being really present
• getting up early and reading inspirational books
• journaling
• walking with my dogs
• nature
• going places–getting a change of scenery
• trying new things in general
• guided meditation
• listening to books and music
• face-to-face conversations with people
• gratitude journal
• better diet
• trying to live more authentically
• paying attention to my breathing
• gathering flowers from my garden
• planting flowers in my garden for later gathering
• art journaling
• stealing a few moments to lie on my bed when the afternoon sun is streaming in through the window
• coffee at coffee shops
• centering prayer
• mindfulness
• forgiveness of others so I don’t carry that stuff around
• simplifying
• a glass of wine at the end of the day
• fresh air
• eclectic playlists
• live music
• bookclub
• support groups
• creating a comfortable house that truly is my home
• lunch dates with good friends
• not skipping sleep to get things done
• trying to multitask less
• scheduling time to myself every day
• reading blogs from people who are honest
• reading for pleasure
• resting with my cat a few feet away
• yoga
• running
• getting my hair done
• getting a manicure
• baking
• knitting
• spinning
• online classes
• just for fun novels
• crafting
• being able to set limits for myself
• asking for what I need
• taking time for slow contemplative morning coffee
• cuddling with my cats
• taking my vitamins
• burning candles
• waking up naturally—no alarm clock
• green smoothies
• take painkillers when I need to instead of holding out and suffering
• earn to be with and accept my feelings
• have adventures and drive to new places
• spend less time on the Internet
• read the newspaper on Sundays at a café
• read poetry or inspiring quotes
• volunteering
• attending church
• good movies
• working with a life coach
• prayer
• taking the long way
• not being in a rush
• saying no
• turning my phone off
• listening to the birds sing
• eating a fresh bagel at a local shop while doing a crossword puzzle
• chocolate
• daily stretching
• eating when I feel like it—not by the clock
So What Does Self-Care Really Mean and Why Is It Essential to Your Career?
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Source: www.theselfcompassionproject.com
Compassion Fatigue Strategies: Mind Management

Our thinking can create a lot of self-induced suffering. Veterinarians have been identified as embodying perfectionistic tendencies and being very hard on themselves, especially in regard to mistakes. While no one intends to make a mistake, it is inevitable as we are human beings after all and not perfect.

How easily can we forgive ourselves? Do we beat ourselves up when things don’t go the way we want them to? Can we let ultimately let go of the unrealistic expectations we have for ourselves? Can we let go of the sadness and pain when the outcome is not what we desire?

Managing our minds is a skill that provides us freedom from suffering. Our emotions can become overwhelming, damaging and breed rumination.

The Self-Coaching Model

This self-coaching model can offer relief. Based on cognitive psychology and the work of Master Life Coach Brooke Castillo, this model gives us the ability to identify thoughts that are creating negative emotions and then, and only then, we can change those thoughts to ones that make us feel better.

This model is based on the following truths:
- We cannot control the world
- Nothing outside of us has the power to make us feel good or bad
- It is not the circumstances, but our thoughts about the circumstances that create our experience
- We attract what we think about
- Emotions are vibrations that lead to actions
- We can’t permanently change our results without changing our thoughts
- We don’t have to get anything to feel better; we can feel better right now
- Being conscious and choosing our thoughts are the most important components to feeling better.

Here are reasons to use this model:
- To feel better
Putting the Model to Use to Solve Any Problem

1. Identify the problem. Even those things that seem petty, if it is bothering you it’s worthy of your attention.

   *My client won’t do what I ask.*

   *I have no work/life balance.*

   *I’m overwhelmed with the stress of the practice.*

   *My student debt is bearing down on me.*

   *I made a mistake and my patient is now very sick and fighting to live.*

2. Plug it into the model in the appropriate category.

   **Circumstance**  
   *I made a mistake and my patient is now very sick and fighting to live.*

   **Thought**

   **Feeling**

   **Action**

   **Result**

3. Fill in the rest of the model based on the problem.

   **Circumstance**  
   *I made a mistake and my patient is now very sick and fighting to live.*

   **Thought**  
   I’m not a good vet

   **Feeling**  
   Doubt

   **Action**  
   I shut down

   **Result**  
   I’ve lost confidence in myself.

Use this template to see a problem in your life and how it is manifesting. At first most models start with the Circumstance or Thought but you can start anywhere and work backwards.
Circumstance _______________________________________________________________

Thought ______________________________________________________________________

Feeling ______________________________________________________________________

Action ______________________________________________________________________

Result ______________________________________________________________________

4. Since THOUGHTS create our FEELINGS we have to find an alternate thought but it must be one we believe otherwise this won’t work. The thought “I’m not a good vet” is creating doubt and that doubt is then causing one to shut down and ultimately lose confidence.

In order to feel better we have to find a THOUGHT that we can believe and that makes us FEEL better when we think it. How else could we think about this situation?

Circumstance __________________________________________________________________

Thought ______________________________________________________________________

Feeling ______________________________________________________________________

Action ______________________________________________________________________

Result ______________________________________________________________________

You must remember that it is not the circumstance or situation that is causing your feel- ings but your thought(s) about the situation.

Following the steps outlined above, use this template to find relief from the problem or issue that you did a model for above. This is where you will change the THOUGHT to one you can believe and that feels better when you think it.

Circumstance _______________________________________________________________

Thought _____________________________

Feeling _____________________________

Action _____________________________

Result _____________________________
You can plug something into the model at any point. For instance you can start with the Feeling or the Action or even the Result. In this example I start with the Result and work backwards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circumstance</th>
<th>Life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thought</td>
<td>I can't do it all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>I overeat and overdrink.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result</td>
<td><strong>Compassion fatigue</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You have to acknowledge your first model before you can re-work it, before you can change the thought.

www.brookecastillo.com
Mindfulness is said to have originated in Buddhist thinking and meditation practice two and a half thousand years ago. Its original purpose was to address and relieve self-induced suffering caused by the dysfunctional ways people habitually tend to respond to their experience. Over the last 30 years, mindfulness has become secularized and simplified to suit a Western context.

In the 1970s anecdotal and research findings about the ability of meditation to reduce unhealthy psychological symptoms triggered interest in mindfulness as a healthcare intervention. Jon Kabat-Zinn at the Medical Center at the University of Massachusetts introduced the first eight week structured mindfulness skills training program which gave considerable psychological, and some physical, relief, to patients experiencing intractable severe pain and distress from a wide range of chronic physical health conditions. This came to be known as MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction). (www.mindfulnessinschools.org)

Researchers recently turned their attention to the interaction between MBSR and compassion fatigue to see whether MBSR would help reduce compassion fatigue symptoms among helpers. One study of clinical nurses found that MBSR helped significantly reduce symptoms of compassion fatigue, as well as helping the subjects be calmer and more grounded during their rounds and interactions with patients and colleagues. (Cohen-Katz et al, 2005) Another study investigate the effect of teaching mindfulness-based stress reduction to graduate students in counseling psychology. The study found that participants in the MBSR program “reported significant declines in stress, negative affect, rumination, state and trait anxiety, and significant increases in positive affect and self-compassion.” (Shapiro, 2007).

Mindfulness is a sustained nonreactive attention to one’s ongoing mental contents and processes (physical sensations, perceptions, affective states, thoughts and imagery) (Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt & Walach 2004; Kabat-Zinn 2005; Miller, Fletcher & Kabat-Zinn 1995).

Said another way Jon Kabat-Zinn PhD describes mindfulness as being in the present moment, on purpose and without judgement. The practice is one of non-doing which in today’s world is very counter to our quick pace, multi-tasking and enticing digital devices.

Throughout our lives we tend to drift away from the peace that resides within us as we respond to external conditioning. Perhaps our upbringing, our career training, trauma and life experiences have caused us to separate from that peace of self.

By cultivating mindfulness, we can learn to identify the negative thoughts that keep us trapped in feelings of self-doubt and shame, and learn instead to embrace the peacefulness that stems from living in the present moment.

If not conscious, we spend the majority of our lives living in the past or future, very rarely in the present moment. Anxiety and worry stem from past or future-thinking. Most of what we fear and are worried about never happens yet we spent an exorbitant amount of time doing so and it creates S.T.R.E.S.S.

*To meditate is to stop the war with the way things are.*
How Mindfulness Can Improve Your Medicine and Your Life
Julie Squires, CCFS

When we become aware of our thoughts and see them as just thoughts and not facts or truth, we are able to find freedom from suffering. Man is the only being that can separate self from thinking. Meaning if I can be aware of my thoughts than I can’t be my thoughts.

While the foundation of mindfulness resides in a sitting meditation, there are many other ways to practice mindfulness such as mindful eating, yoga and walking meditations.

Regardless of the practice, the goal is only to be present. We do this by noticing. Noticing the here and now, inhale and the exhale, the sounds around us, the texture and taste of food, etc.

Breathing

_Sometimes my mind acts so confused with thoughts and feelings that I don’t know which way to turn But then I remember my breath and I am one with my treasure again._

The breath becomes our anchor because by paying attention to it, we automatically become present. As we bring full attention to the inhalation and exhalation we let go of the past and don’t travel to the future. By practicing we learn how to rest in the present moment and be with what is, breath by breath.

Taking some time each day for mindfulness meditation is a simple yet powerful way to develop concentration, regain stability and balance, become responsive versus reactive, and enjoy an ease of being if just for this moment, if just for this breath. With a willingness to bring our attention to the breath, to be fully present for each inhalation and exhalation, we let go of the past (the previous breath) and do not travel into the future (the next breath). With this intention and attention we gain the ability to rest in the present moment, to be with what is, breath by breath, moment by moment.

PRACTICES

Return to the Body

Arrive and rest in the present moment by bringing your attention to your body when are sitting, standing or reclining. Notice sensations felt at the points of contact your body is making with the chair, the floor, the earth of the bed.

Arriving

When transitioning from one activity to another, take a moment to arrive. Focus your attention on the your body as it is in the present moment. By taking a moment to stop and pause throughout the day, we can be fully present for this moment, this person, this meal.

Eating Meditation

“When you eat, just eat!” Be present, aware and awake while eating and drinking throughout the day. Sipping and savoring your morning tea or coffee is a fantastic way to bring mindfulness into your life and to rest in the present moment.

Solitary Activities
How Mindfulness Can Improve Your Medicine and Your Life
Julie Squires, CCFS

Each moment is an opportunity to practice mindfulness. Bring mindfulness to your daily solitary activities such as washing your hands, brushing your teeth, taking a shower, cooking, stopping at a red light, doing the dishes, etc.

Awareness of Breath Meditation

This guided meditation on the breath will help you learn to simply be and to look within yourself with mindfulness and equanimity. Allow yourself to switch from the usual mode of doing to a mode of non-doing. Of simply being. Sitting in an erect posture, either on a straight back chair or on a cushion. As you allow your body to become still, bring your attention to the fact that you are breathing. And become aware of the movement of your breath as it comes into your body and as it leaves your body. Not manipulating the breath in any way or trying to change it. Simply being aware of it and of the feelings associated with breathing. And observing the breath deep down in your belly. Feeling the abdomen as it expands gently on the inbreath, and as it falls back towards your spine on the outbreath. Being totally here in each moment with each breath. Not trying to do anything, not trying to get any place, simply being with your breath. Giving full care and attention to each inbreath and to each outbreath. As they follow one after the other in a never ending cycle and flow.

You will find that from time to time your mind will wander off into thoughts. When you notice that your attention is no longer here and no longer with your breathing, and without judging yourself, bring your attention back to your breathing and ride the waves of your breathing, fully conscious of the duration of each breath from moment to moment. Every time you find your mind wandering off the breath, gently bringing it back to the present, back to the moment-to-moment observing of the flow of your breathing. Using your breath as an anchor to focus your attention, to bring you back to the present whenever you notice that your mind is becoming absorbed or reactive. Using your breath to help you tune into a state of relaxed awareness and stillness.

Now as you observe your breathing, you may find from time to time that you are becoming aware of sensations in your body. As you maintain awareness of your breathing, see if it is possible to expand the field of your awareness so that it includes a sense of your body as a whole as you sit here. Feeling your body, from head to toe, and becoming aware of all the sensations in your body. So that now you are observing not only the flow of breathing, but the sense of your body as a whole.

Being here with whatever feelings and sensations come up in any moment without judging them, without reacting to them, just being fully here, fully aware. Totally present with whatever your feelings are and with your breath and a sense of your body as a whole. And again whenever you notice that your mind wandering off, just bringing it back to your breathing and your body as you sit here not going anywhere, not doing anything just simply being, simply sitting. Moment to moment, being fully present, fully with yourself.

Reestablishing your awareness on the body as a whole and on the breath as it moves in and out of your body. Coming back to a sense of fullness of each inbreath, and the fullness of each outbreath. If you find yourself at any point drawn into a stream of thinking and you notice that you are no longer observing the breath, just using your breathing and the sense of your body to anchor you and stabilize you in the present.
How Mindfulness Can Improve Your Medicine and Your Life
Julie Squires, CCFS

Just being with your breathing from moment to moment, just sitting in stillness, looking for noth-
ing and being present to all. Just as it is, just as it unfolds. Just being right here, right now.
Complete. Human. Whole.

As the practice comes to an end, you might give yourself credit for having spent this time nou-
rishing yourself in a deep way by dwelling in this state of non-doing, in this state of being. For
having intentionally made time for yourself to simply be who you are. And as you move back
into the world, allow the benefits of this practice to expand into every aspect of your life.

Guided Mountain Meditation

Sit with a straight back, your head held erect on your neck and shoulders, allow the shoulders to
fully relax. And place your hands on your knees.

Close your eyes and bring your attention to the flow of your breathing. Feeling each inbreath
and each outbreath. Just observing your breathing without trying to change it or regulate it in
any way. Allowing the body to be still. And sitting with a sense of dignity, a sense of resolve, a
sense of being complete, whole, in this very moment, with your posture reflecting this sense of
wholeness.

And as you sit here, picturing in your mind’s eye as best you can the most beautiful mountain
that you know or have seen or can imagine. Just holding the image and feeling of this mountain
in your mind’s eye, letting it gradually come into greater focus. Observing its overall shape, its
lofty peak high in the sky, the large base rooted in the rock of the earth’s crust, its steep or gent-
ly sloping sides. Noticed how massive it is, how solid, how unmoving, how beautiful both from
afar and up close.

Perhaps your mountain has snow at the top and trees on the lower slopes. Perhaps it has one
prominent peak, perhaps a series of peaks or a high plateau. Whatever its shape or appear-
ance, just sitting and breathing with the image of this mountain. Observing it, noticing its quali-
ties and when you feel ready, seeing if you can bring the mountain into your own body so that
the body sitting here and the mountain in your mind’s eye become one. So that as you sit here
you share in the massiveness and the stillness and majesty of the mountain. You become the
mountain rooted in the sitting posture, your head becomes the lofty peak, supported by the rest
of the body. Your shoulders and arms the sides of the mountain. Your buttocks and legs the sol-
id base rooted to your chair. Experiencing in your body a sense of uplift from deep within your
pelvis and spine, with each breath as you continue sitting, becoming a little more a breathing
mountain, unwavering in your stillness, completely what you are, beyond words and thought. A
centered, rooted, unmoving presence.

Now as you sit here becoming aware of the fact that as the sun travels across the sky, the light
and shadows and colors are changing virtually moment by moment. Night follows day and day
follows night. A canopy of stars, the moon, then the sun. Through it all, the mountain just sits,
experiencing change in each moment. Constantly changing, yet always just being itself. It re-
 mains still as the seasons flow into one another and as the weather changes, moment by mo-
ment, and day by day. Calmness abiding all change.

In summer, there’s no snow on the mountain except perhaps for the very peaks. In fall, the
mountain may wear a coat of brilliant fire colors. In winter, a blanket of snow and ice. In any
season, it may find itself at times enshrouded in clouds or fog or pelted by freezing rain. People may come to see the mountain and comment on how beautiful it is or on how it’s not a good day to see the mountain. None of this matters to the mountain which remains at all times its essential self. Clouds may come, and clouds may go. The mountain’s magnificence and beauty are not changed one bit by the way people see it or not or by the weather. Seen or unseen, in sun or clouds, broiling or frigid, day or night, it just sits, being itself. At times, visited by violent storms, buffeted by snow and rain and winds of unthinkable magnitude. Through it all, the mountain continues to sit unmoved by the weather, by what happens on the surface, by the world of appearances.

And in the same way, as we sit in meditation, we can learn to experience the mountain. We can embody the same unwavering stillness and rootedness in the face of everything that changes in our own lives over seconds, over hours, over years. In our lives and in our meditation practice, we constantly experience the changing nature of mind and body and of the outer world. We have our own periods of light and darkness, our moments of color and our moments of drabness. Certainly, we experience storms of varying intensity and violence in the outer world and in our own minds and bodies. We endure periods of darkness and pain, as well as the moments of joy. Even our appearance changes constantly, experiencing a weather of its own.

By becoming the mountain in our meditation practice, we can link up with its strength and stability and adopt it for our own. We can use its energies to support our energy to encounter each moment with mindfulness and equanimity and clarity. It may help us to see that our thoughts and feelings, our preoccupations, our emotional storms and crises, even the things that happen to us, are very much like the weather on the mountain. We tend to take it all personally but its strongest characteristic is impersonal. The weather of our own lives is not to be ignored or denied. It is to be encountered, honored, felt, known for what it is and held in awareness. And in holding it in this way, we come to know a deeper silence, and stillness, and wisdom. Mountains have this to teach us and much more if we can come to listen.

Loving Kindness Meditation

The practice of loving kindness meditation brings to life our innate capacity for connecting to ourselves and others. It is the feelings of judgment and indifference that keeps us feeling separate. Separation creates pain and suffering.

As helpers, we often feel as though we have to get lost in another’s pain to truly serve and help them. When in fact all we need to do is be present with them. There is no greater gift you can give another than your presence.

Loving kindness meditation is simple yet powerful. Sit comfortably with your eyes closed. You are going to silently repeat certain phrases while sending your heart’s intention to yourself and others.

Begin by noticing the breath…the inhale…the exhale. After a few breaths bring to your awareness someone who is easy to love, this could be a child, a spouse a pet. As you hold them in your awareness, begin to send loving kindness to them and silently say:

May you be safe
May you be happy
How Mindfulness Can Improve Your Medicine and Your Life
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May you be healthy
May you be free from suffering

Return back to your breath for a few moments and then bring yourself to your awareness. Whether or not you are feeling loving kindness towards yourself in this moment, that's OK. You can hold the intention of loving kindness towards yourself while you silently say:

May I be safe
May I be happy
May I be healthy
May I be free from suffering

Return back to your breath and then bring your awareness to a stranger. Someone you don’t know well but may see often like a cashier, someone at the dog park or someone at work you don’t often talk to. While holding them in your awareness begin sending loving kindness by silently saying:

May you be safe
May you be happy
May you be healthy
May you be free from suffering

Returning back to your breath for a few moments before bringing into your awareness someone you have or are having a difficult relationship with. Not the most difficult relationship you have or one that was traumatic but someone you are having a hard time with right now. With them in your awareness, silently send loving kindness by saying:

May you be safe
May you be happy
May you be healthy
May you be free from suffering

And returning to the breath, bring to your heart and awareness all beings everywhere in the universe. With love and intention in your heart begin sending loving kindness while silently saying:

May you be safe
May you be happy
May you be healthy
May you be free from suffering

Bring your focus back to your breath and notice the sensations you feel in your body and in your heart. Breathe. Nothing to judge. Just be with yourself in this moment. And when you feel ready, begin to open your eyes.

Note: You can also do parts of this meditation, for instance maybe for just yourself if you are having a difficult day or for a patient or client that is having a hard time. You can also use other similar phrases if these don’t resonate with you.

Reference:
Mindfulness Meditation, CD Series, Jon Kabat-Zinn

Resources:

University of Massachusetts Medical School, Center for Mindfulness
http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/

Mind and Life Institute, www.mindandlife.org

Center for Investigating Healthy Minds www.investigatinghealthyminds.org


