

How to be Mindful of Physical Pain

Mindfulness Worksheet

Date / Time:

What have you brought mindful awareness to today? Check all that apply.

Heart

Mind

Body

Breath

Environment

To begin this Meditation, please bring kind awareness to

- why you chose this topic
- how your belly, chest, and head each feel when you reflect on this topic
- the emotions that you can associate with these visceral feelings
- the positive or negative impact of any stories you believe in regarding this topic
- the fact that many others are feeling similarly about this topic as you
- how you might feel with increased awareness around this topic
- when you can apply increased mindfulness to this topic in your day-to-day life



When working with pain, you must first determine if the pain is acute or chronic. Acute pain often comes from a recent injury or a physical problem that may require urgent medical attention.

Once the underlying cause of the acute pain has been treated and healed, the pain generally stops. Chronic pain could also have a physical cause but the pain persists despite the fact that the injury has been treated and healed because pain signals remain active in the nervous system.

This is likely to be associated with cognitive or emotional effects such as fear of reinjury, depression, anxiety, anger, grief or confusion.

Step 1: Examining Pain and Tension in the Body

1. Clenching and tightening is a common reaction to pain. This reaction, however, can not only cause the physical pain to increase, it can also intensify feelings of fear, anger, confusion or sadness.
2. Tightening around pain causes further constriction of the muscles and restriction of blood flow, which may in turn cause more pain and spasms that could possibly affect other areas throughout the body.

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3. The body scan provides an opportunity to examine the pain and learn to distinguish physical sensations from emotional and mental feelings and then recognize strong sensations in the body as just physical sensations.
4. Living with physical pain and tension can be very difficult and often increases levels of anxiety and stress. It is important to learn techniques for coping with pain and how to reduce it.
5. Once you become aware of how you react to pain and hold it in the body, you can plan the best way to work with it.
6. For example, you may have headaches and, using the body scan, discover that the tension and tightness extends down through the neck and shoulders into the upper back—that your entire upper body is a constricted mass of pain. By holding this musculoskeletal tension you may be further exacerbating your pain.

Step 2: Collaborating with the Emotions in Physical Pain

1. As with physical pain, burying and resisting emotions often causes more pain, while “going with the flow”, rather than fighting them, can often decrease the distress associated with them. Rather than fighting difficult emotions, simply acknowledge and allow the emotions to go wherever they need to go.
2. There are significant distinctions between “acknowledgment” and “acceptance,” and between “letting be” and “letting go.” “Acknowledgement” is seeing things as they are, whether you like it or not. “Acceptance,” on the other hand, can be seen as being okay with it or in agreement with things as they are.
3. When it comes to pain, it can be difficult to be okay with the pain, but you can acknowledge it even if you don’t accept it.
4. Likewise, “letting go” is different from “letting be.” “Letting go” implies being able to release, whereas “letting be” simply provides space for things to be as they are. Just like the ocean gives space to the waves, you can give space to your emotions.

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5. Acknowledging emotional pain can help you come to terms with it. As you begin to understand the differences between your physical pain and your emotional reactions to it, you will begin to see the difference between physical pain and suffering.
6. Even if you cannot change the physical sensations of pain, you can change your emotional reaction to it and reducing your suffering.
7. In other words, physical pain is concrete, but suffering is elective. The pain receptors in the body are designed to feel pain, but the pain response is controlled by your reaction to it.

Step 3: Living “Now”

1. The third step is living in the here and now. The truth is, you can only live in the present moment. This is the only moment in which you can make any changes. Viewing chronic pain or stress and tension as a long-term problem takes you out of the present moment, thereby increasing your suffering.
2. You must concentrate on the here and now. Mindfulness practice allows you to deal with your pain one moment at a time.

How will you take what you learned from this forward into your life?