Sutter Health

Being Mindful at Work

Think you've got to bend your legs like a pretzel and sit for hours to achieve mindfulness? Think again. This once-obscure Buddhist concept is growing in popularity—no yoga mat required.

The timing couldn't be better, either. Recent polls indicate we are more stressed-out than ever. Three in 10 Americans say that their stress has increased in the past year and 20 percent report that they are experiencing extreme stress.

Mindfulness can get us back to center. At its heart, mindfulness is observing what is happening in the present without calling it good or bad. Observing without judging keeps us out of a past we can't change or a future we can't control.

When we practice mindfulness at work, we focus more easily. We respond rather than react, and increase our ability to regulate emotions. We make better decisions. In short, our brains slow down. We manage our stress levels while simultaneously increasing our productivity.

MINDFUL WITHOUT THE MAT

Here are a few activities to get you started practicing mindfulness at work:

Take a walk. Find a quiet space to walk and keep an open awareness of everything around you. Notice the sounds, smells and sights of your environment, as well as the physical sensations of walking.

Stretch. Step away from work for several minutes. While focusing on your breath, roll your shoulders, reach for the sky and get your blood flowing. Remembering your body brings you back to the present and helps you focus.

Lunch well. When you are eating, enjoy the tastes, textures and smells of your food. Make a point to pay full attention to the experience—don't read or watch TV at the same time.

Breathe. Put your hand on your belly and focus your attention on your breath. As air flows in and out of your body, your attention will wander. Notice your thoughts come and go without judging or obsessing over them.

Sources include the American Psychological Association, California Department of Human Resources, Mindful.org and *Preventing Chronic Disease*.

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