

## **Mindfulness in Health Care: How It Benefits Patients, Clinicians and Administrators**



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Mindfulness “clearly is a wave across the country,” says Ronald Epstein, a physician and professor of family medicine, psychiatry and oncology at the University of Rochester Medical Center. Epstein’s 2017 book, *Attending: Medicine, Mindfulness, and Humanity*, is billed as the first book for the general public about mindfulness and medical practice.

According to Dr. Epstein, mindfulness can be a powerful tool for medical professionals for dealing with personal stress, being more compassionate, and reducing clinical errors. “Anyone whose work involves immense human

suffering needs to be aware of their inner life,” he said. “The nature of the work that physicians do makes (them) more vulnerable to negative emotions or making errors.”

### **What the Research Says**

Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D., a pioneer in mindful-based stress reduction, defines mindfulness as “paying attention in the present moment, non-judgmentally.” Mindfulness practices may include meditation, but they can also be as simple as selecting a daily activity to perform “mindfully.” The benefits of mindfulness activities include:

- improved physical and mental well-being
- an increased capacity for resiliency
- an increased ability to manage stress

Mindfulness activities enable us to focus on the present moment and free our mind from regrets over past events and anxieties about the future. Mindful individuals acknowledge that anxious thoughts will arise again, but choose to continually refocus their attention on the here and now. At their core, mindfulness activities often involve sitting quietly and breathing—an increasingly rare occurrence in our plugged-in modern society.

In the health care workplace, encouraging employees to stop and focus on the present may seem contrary to achieving organizational goals. However, research is finding that mindfulness activities improve an employee’s cognitive functions.

These benefits equate to higher employee productivity, giving individuals an increased ability to focus fully on one task at a time. A reduction in workplace absences is another major benefit of stress management through mindfulness activities. According to research by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, stress is the number one reason for long-term workplace absences.

Another recent [study](#), conducted by researchers Erik Dane and Bradley Brummel, indicated that in a dynamic work environment, engaging in mindfulness practices positively impacted job performance and decreased turnover. Mindfulness practices offer an antidote to all of the stress, rework, and errors that occur when our attention strays.

Studies conducted by neuroscientist Richard Davidson of the Center for Investigating Health Minds also found that mindfulness activities improve “cognitive flexibility, creativity and innovation, well-being, emotional regulation and empathy.”

### **Practicing Mindfulness**

The book, *Finding the Space to Lead, A Practical Guide to Mindful Leadership*, by Janice Marturano, provides practical approaches for how to incorporate self-awareness, meditation, and the ability to be present into our everyday work life. Marturano suggests that clarity, focus, creativity, and compassion are the fundamentals of

mindful leadership.

There are many ways that employers can create a more mindful workplace atmosphere for employees. Here are a few examples:

- Set aside a room where employees can go to meditate or take a purposeful pause from the multitasking demands of the day.
- Encourage employees to take breaks for mindful activities (like walking or stretching) every 90 or 120 minutes.
- Incorporate mindfulness philosophies into corporate initiatives, leadership training, or employee stress-management programs.

Routinely encouraging employees to focus one task at a time, providing additional company resources as needed, and emphasizing the health benefits of mindfulness in company newsletters and communications could positively impact employee morale and retention in the long run.

While improvements in telecommunications and mobile technologies have made the act of multitasking more convenient than ever, these tools have not made work less stressful. While many of us believe multitasking saves time, new scientific evidence suggests we are less efficient and experience more stress when we try to juggle multiple tasks at once. By practicing mindfulness more often in our professional and personal lives, and learning to take things one step at a time, we can become happier and more productive.

### **Keep it Simple**

As the body of research on mindfulness grows, we see how mindfulness can be used by many people and in many places to great effect—even in an elementary school curriculum. In the powerful video “[Just Breathe](#)” by Julie Bayer Salzman & Josh Salzman of Wavecrest Films, kindergarteners recount how they practice breathing to calm themselves when they experience difficult emotions. If they can try it, why can’t we?

Methods for practicing mindfulness at work and in life don’t have to be complex to be effective. Start small and keep it simple, and start experiencing the benefits of mindfulness for yourself.