ATTENTIONAL FITNESS TRAINING

Promoting Attentional Fitness: Demystifying Mindfulness
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“Between stimulus and response there is a space. 
In that space is our power to choose our response. 
In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”
~ Viktor Frankl

ATTENTIONAL FITNESS: A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO MINDFULNESS

What is mindfulness?

“Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, nonjudgmentally.”
~ Jon Kabat-Zinn

What is attentional fitness?

Physical exercises strengthen the body. Mindfulness exercises develop the ability to focus, recharge, and regulate ourselves. We can use what we already know about physical fitness to help navigate the challenges of developing attentional fitness.

Intentionally foregrounding sensory perceptions—more often than never—develops attentional fitness. When it becomes habitual, it leads to savoring pleasant moments more, fighting with unpleasant moments less, and feeling more at home in the messiness of real life.

One piece of the overall wellbeing puzzle

- getting enough sleep
- moderate physical exercise
- moderate attentional exercise
- healthy eating habits
- addressing symptoms (medical, mental health) and age-related declines (vision, hearing, mobility)
- fostering social-emotional connections
- engaging in interests, hobbies, lifelong learning
Attention exercises develop liberating attentional skills

- concentration
- discriminating palate for sensory perception
- emotional awareness
- self-regulation
- magnanimity (civility, empathy, kindness)

General resources related to attentional fitness


WALLS, WINDOWS, AND WAYFINDING

Myth: People think mindfulness means converting to a different belief system
Reality: Mindfulness is grounded in science and supports existing belief system

Books


Podcasts

- 10 Percent Happier (www.tenpercent.com/podcast)
- The Art of Attention (www.wcbe.org/programs/art-attention)
- The Art of Noticing (http://robwalker.net/noticing/)
- Hidden Brain (www.npr.org/podcasts/510308/hidden-brain)

ATTESTATIONAL FITNESS TRAINING

Myth: People think mindfulness is weird
Reality: Mindfulness is practical and supports living more fully

Books


Programs

- Palouse Mindfulness (free online version of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program: [https://palousemindfulness.com])

- Attentional Fitness: Awareness Modes Program
  Explore these guided mindful awareness exercises separately, together, and as starting points to longer exercise sessions. [http://bit.ly/AwarenessModes]

Exercises


**Myth: People is difficult**
*Reality: Mindfulness is challenging but doable*

- Relaxation practice – notice restful sensations
- Task practice – track sensations during tasks usually done on autopilot
- Trigger practice – track real-time emotional reactions
- Timed-practice – notice any category of sensation for a set duration

**Basic attentional fitness practice guidelines:**

- Practice for more than zero seconds/minutes most days.
- Prioritize mindfulness practice over reading or thinking about it.
- Keep it to yourself.
- Don’t police other’s lack of mindfulness.

**Books about cultivating habits**


**Mindfulness apps**

- **Waking Up** (subscription) wakingup.com
- **Insight Timer** (free, subscription) InsightTimer.com
- **Brightmind** (subscription) brightmind.com
- **10% Happier** (subscription) 10percenthappier.com
- **Calm** (subscription) calm.com
- **Headspace** (subscription) headspace.com
- **Craving to Quit, Eat Right Now, and Unwinding Anxiety** (habit change programs) drjud.com
PROMOTING ATTENTIONAL FITNESS IN LIBRARIES

- **Practice yourself to experience the challenges and benefits**
  - When we start exploring mindfulness for ourselves, the benefits extend to others whether we explicitly encourage them to practice.
  - We also discover practical and paradoxical things that require direct experience rather than conceptual understanding.
  - The more I practice, the better I get at translating our experience to others and to helping them navigate the challenges of contemplative skill development.

- **Encourage personalization and customization**

- **Mindfulness isn’t a replacement for other supports**


**Facilitate discussions about “sensing” rather than “making sense”**

- Describe a time you felt really present
- Describe a time you feel like your attention was somewhere else
- What ways are some tasks that you do regularly that don’t require a lot of thinking? Could you sneak some mindful awareness into them?

**Emphasize exploration of sensory perceptions rather than meditation**

- Instead of getting bogged down in religion, philosophy, or ideology, emphasize the challenge of letting analysis and problem-solving eat up our entire attentional budget unless we decide to exercise our attention once in a while.

- This can be part of discussions about forming better habits around technology use.

ATTENTIONAL FITNESS TRAINING

- Focusing on an exploration of sensory perceptions is a great way to introduce attentional fitness to children while keeping it fun.

  
  
  - Garcia, G. (2019). *Listening to my body: A guide to helping kids understand the connection between their sensations (What the heck are those?) and Feelings so that they can get better at figuring out what they need*. Austin, Texas: Skinned Knee Publishing. [http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1148465793](http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1148465793)
  
  
  
  
  
See also: Ninja Life Hacks Series: [www.marynhin.com](http://www.marynhin.com)


• **Use news-related stress as an opportunity to explore information literacy**


    The first move (STOP) is a great opportunity to investigate real-time emotional reactions that drive us to spread disinformation. Imagine the impact of disrupting our reflexive impulses to share something that pushes our buttons or seems to provide certainty in the midst of great uncertainty.


