

Practicing Mindfulness: Strategies for Dementia Caregivers

Presented by



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Alzheimer's Texas

A privately funded voluntary health organization formed in 1982 to serve Central Texans with Alzheimer's disease and their caregivers.

MISSION

To eliminate Alzheimer's disease and related disorders through the advancement of research and to enhance care and support for individuals, their families, and caregivers.

VISION

To create and sustain a dementia capable Texas in which persons with Alzheimer's and related disorders, and their families, receive quality care, effective treatments, and meaningful support.



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Learning Objectives

- Understand descriptions of various mindfulness strategies that can be helpful for caregivers.
- Identify the potential benefits and limitations of mindfulness approaches for dementia caregivers.
- Learn strategies for applying mindfulness based interventions to the real challenges dementia caregivers face.
- Think about and share ways we can apply and educate others about these strategies.



What is Mindfulness?

- Originated in Buddhist faith and doctrine.
- No universally accepted definition for “mindfulness.” The term has proven difficult to define.
- Mindfulness may be generally understood as the state in which one becomes more aware of one's physical, mental, and emotional condition in the present moment, without becoming judgmental. Individuals may be able to pay attention to a variety of experiences, such as bodily sensations, cognitions, and feelings, and accept them without being influenced by them.
- Mindfulness practices are believed to be able to help people better control their thoughts, rather than be controlled by them.
- Increasing in popularity in the physical and mental health fields, schools, businesses, the entertainment industry, and the military.

What are Mindfulness Based Interventions



Interventions that promote the practice of mindfulness as an important part of good physical and mental health.

Currently, there are four recognized therapy models that incorporate mindfulness practices:

- In the 1970s, John Kabat-Zinn, founded a mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program and was one of the first individuals to attempt to integrate Buddhist principles of mindfulness into his work in science and medicine.
- Also in the 1970s, Marsha Linehan developed Dialectical Behavioral Therapy with the aid of certain Western and Eastern spiritual influences.
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy was introduced in the late 1980s by Steven Hayes, Kelly Wilson, and Kirk Strosahl and also incorporates Eastern ideas and techniques.
- At the beginning of the 21st century, Zindel Segal, Mark Williams, and John Teasdale built upon Kabat-Zinn's work to develop **Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy**

Why are Mindfulness Based Interventions a Great Fit for Dementia Caregivers?

A systematic review reported that caregivers of persons with dementia show elevated stress, and poorer attention and executive function performance (Allen et al., 2017).

Caregivers of persons with dementia show increased levels of anxiety and depression (Baumgarten et al., 1994; Mahoney et al., 2005).

Studies have reported that caregiving for a person with dementia may be particularly stressful compared to other forms of caregiving (Ory et al., 1999; Kim and Schulz, 2008).

Many mindfulness approaches can be performed by caregivers themselves over short periods of time with little preparation.

Benefits of Mindfulness Approaches

Cognitive

Emotional

Psychological

Attention

Memory

Executive
function

Processing
speed

Self-
awareness

Emotion-
regulation



Mindfulness Approaches For Caregivers Has Been Shown to Improve

Depression

Anxiety

Self Efficacy

Mindfulness

Stress

Caregiver
Burden

Social
Support

Quality of
Life

Mood
Disturbance



Limitations of Mindfulness Based Interventions

Inconclusive or only preliminary evidence on the effects of MBIs on:

- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Eating disorders
- Loneliness
- Physical symptoms of cardiovascular diseases
- Diabetes
- Respiratory conditions

Some beneficial effects are not confirmed in subgroup populations

Mindfulness Based Interventions

Mindfulness Meditation

- Breathing exercises/Focusing on your breath
- Body scan meditations
- Guided Imagery
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Repeating a phrase
- Focusing on current activity

Mindfulness Techniques

- Relaxing activities
- Writing down your routine
- Keeping a journal
- Gentle yoga
- Tracking your sleep patterns
- Physical exercise
- Understanding your thoughts
- Practicing gratitude

Practicing Mindfulness Meditation to Reduce Caregiver Stress

- ✓ Find a comfortable position; your eyes can be closed or with a soft focus on a point in front of you.
- ✓ Set your intention for your practice (to cultivate patience, to get a break, to better your health).
- ✓ Take 3 full “in” (through your nose) and “out” breaths (through your mouth), then return to a natural breath.
- ✓ Focus your attention on your breath, gently labeling it “in, out, in, out” or “rising, falling.”
- ✓ When you feel your attention is steady, let go of these “subtitles” and experience your breath just as it is, being aware that you are aware. In place of breath, you can also focus on any of your senses – sight, sound, taste, touch/sensation, smell, and even thoughts/cognitions.
- ✓ When you find that you are no longer paying attention to your breath – or other object of focus – just begin again. This is the practice – leaving the present and bringing yourself back again and again.
- ✓ When your time is complete, consider the possibility of carrying this mindful awareness with you throughout the day.



RAIN: Four Steps to Manage Difficult Emotions Mindfully

- **Recognize** – Acknowledge what you are feeling. Ask yourself, “What is happening inside me right now?” You can gently label it non-judgmentally: Fear, Sadness, Frustration, etc.
- **Allowing** (Acceptance) – Be willing to be present to your experience, no matter how unpleasant. Whatever you notice, let it be.
- **Investigate** – Unhook yourself from the object or story, so you can witness the emotion with kindness, and from an unbiased perspective. Mindfulness of body is a great technique here – what are you feeling in your body? Ask yourself “What am I believing to be true?”
- **Non-Identification** – Recognize you are not this emotion or experience. It is a temporary event, and eventually it will be gone too. Watch the emotion with an attitude of natural presence.



Gratitude Journaling

Typical instructions for a gratitude journal:

- There are many things in our lives, both large and small, that we might be grateful about.
- Think back over the past week and write down on the lines below up to five things in your life that you are grateful or thankful for.

If this was my journal, for example, I would list the following five things I am grateful for:

- I am healthy enough to run.
- My mom makes me smile.
- I was resilient today.
- We had a nutritious lunch.
- We bought a heater so that our house isn't cold.

The items that you are grateful for can be inanimate or animate, material or abstract, as general or specific as you want. The point is that you find things that you are grateful for.



Sample Mindfulness Meditation Journal

Date	Location	Time	Duration

Method

Meditation Position

Meditation Focus	Thoughts & Insights

Reflection		
Grateful	Accomplish	Work On

Notes

Tips for Practicing Mindfulness for Caregiver Stress

- It is called practice – not performance! You will get distracted. This is normal. The most important thing is that you start over and over as often as you need to – with a gentle and kind attitude to yourself.
- Regular practice for shorter intervals is better than one BIG practice each week. For example, start with 5-10 minutes 3 times a week, and work your way up to 10-20 minutes 5 days a week. Try it for 8 weeks. And then for the rest of your life.
- Use a kitchen timer, your phone, or an app such as the Insight Meditation Timer so you do not have to keep opening your eyes. Commit to practice the whole time!
- Incorporate informal awareness breaks into your day. Stop and take a deep breath or feel your hands on the steering wheel. Actually taste the food you put in your mouth. Find a task you do every day and try to approach it mindfully. Even a few seconds can help your body interrupt the fight-or-flight response and bring you more peace and health.
- Try walking meditation. With your eyes open, pay attention to your feet as they hit the floor. So often we are stuck in our heads – this gives you the chance to notice the rest of your body, which creates more space in this moment.
- Schedule time for mindfulness, or it might not happen.

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Questions?

What do you want us to know?

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