

Will Power

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FROM THE PIONEERS ASSISTANCE FUND

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MIND YOUR HEALTH

Q: I've heard meditation reduces stress. I can't sit cross-legged on the floor any more and I'm not sure I can meditate. Is there a "light" version?

A: Usually, we advise our readers to avoid gimmicks or quick fix promises for health. However, with this one, we are encouraging our clients to get on this mental health bandwagon because meditation is not new. It is thousands of years old with scientific support for its positive effects on health, mood and overall functioning.

A "lighter" version of meditation is called mindfulness. Whereas meditation is a vast field of practice, encompassing different cultures and goals, mindfulness is an individual and more narrow experience. Mindfulness is focusing only on your immediate task, whether that is walking or breathing. You can adapt it to your own abilities and environment. No sitting cross-legged, chanting, or experience needed!

"Mindfulness means maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment. Mindfulness also involves acceptance, meaning that we pay attention to our thoughts and feelings without judging them—without believing, for instance, that

there's a "right" or "wrong" way to think or feel in a given moment," states The Greater Good Science Center at University of California, Berkeley (<http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/mindfulness/definition>).

Another name for mindfulness could be presence, or even being in the moment. It is the antithesis of multitasking, which splits our focus, fracturing our concentration and attention, both of which are required for good cognitive functioning. Mindfulness is also good for our mood. It teaches us to accept our situation of the moment, minimizing feelings of being self-critical or overwhelmed.

Start with small steps toward mindfulness. Be patient while you adopt this practice and do not judge yourself in the process. Peace be with you!

1. *While eating, focus on eating. Taste each bite. Feel sated or full.*
2. *Do just one thing and think about that one thing without judgment, like reading this.*
3. *Take a minute when you wake up and when you go to bed to think about waking, or sleeping. You've done these every day for your whole life. Draw your attention to your routine and accept it. If you want to change some aspect, do so without criticism.*

JOKE OF THE MONTH

A duck walks into a drugstore and tells the druggist she wants a tube of lipstick. The druggist says "will that be cash or charge?" The duck says, "Just put it on my bill."

- A Prairie Home Companion Website

WILL CALL

Do you or someone you know need our assistance? Call toll-free (888) 994-3863 or wrpioneers.org





SELF-CARE & SELF-MEDICATING

Last month we offered a simple list of self-care techniques to help our clients stay healthy, happy, mentally sharp and financially secure. This month we are sharing something NOT to do, which is to use destructive behaviors to cope with stress, depression or anxiety: a practice called self-medicating.

Some people do it with drinking, some with smoking, others with painkillers, gambling, food or shopping. The objective of self-medicating is to distract oneself from personal problems, rather than seek a solution or treatment. The temporary “high” or relief from symptoms is why people self-medicate. The problem is that they may be treating the wrong thing in an unhealthy way. A common example is drinking alcohol or using drugs to escape the fact that a person is depressed or anxious. Instead of dealing with the underlying mood problem or life stresses, drugs and alcohol allow the user to simply avoid the issue. The problem is that this approach leads to many more problems.

ARE YOU SELF-MEDICATING?

Examine your relationships. Are they healthy? Are they lasting? Has anyone said something to you, such as a comment about your shopping, drinking or smoking?

Are your finances suffering because of a certain habit that you justify as “blowing off steam”? Problems at work are usually a red flag, with job-loss being a real risk. Can you stop your habitual, destructive behavior or has someone asked you to stop?

START HERE.

Hire a licensed mental health professional. Self-medicating is based on self-diagnosis. Realize that if you really understood what was wrong, you would treat it in a more successful, less destructive manner, i.e., with exercise instead of diet pills.

Second, determine with a professional what treatment options are appropriate for that diagnosis and what your insurance covers. Get needed referrals. Most communities have free and low-cost help available.

Steps in the right direction take some effort, but examine the effort to self-medicate. How far have you gone to cover up your stress, anxiety or unhappiness? Taking care of yourself is a valuable use of your resources.

Mind Your Health Sources:

“Ancient Meditation Techniques” at http://www.project-meditation.org/a_mt4/ancient_meditation_techniques.html.

“Mindfulness-based psychotherapies: a review of conceptual foundations, empirical evidence and practical considerations.” Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 2006, Vol. 40, No. 4, Pages 285-294. at <http://informahealthcare.com/doi/abs/10.1080/j.1440-1614.2006.01794.x>

Self-Care & Self-Medicating Sources:

Find helpful articles at the “Do You Self-Medicate?” page at Psychology Today online at <http://www.psychologytoday.com/collections/201208/do-you-self-medicate>.

“Recognizing Forms of Self-Medication” by Stephanie Faris, Published on 3/28/12 and medically reviewed by George Krucik, MD available at www.healthline.com.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“Everybody is ignorant, only on different subjects.”

- Will Rogers