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**Exposure to Mindfulness Basics Through Existing Habits: A Brief 5-Week Curriculum for
Exercisers**

Meredith Tedford

Mindfulness Studies, Lesley University

September 2022

Dr. Melissa Jean & Dr. Andrew Olendzki

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Acknowledgments

My Lesley professors and classmates: I have learned so much with and from all of you and am honored to be a part of this community of lifelong learners. The experience of returning to school has been both challenging and rewarding and I am deeply grateful for our time together.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the mind-body connection inherent in both physical exercise and mindfulness and how habit-formation can play a key role in introducing regular exercisers to the benefits of mindful practice. New habits are established when they are linked to established daily routines through small modifications to existing patterns of behavior, but this runs counter to how traditional mindfulness practice is typically taught. By providing exercisers with a limited time-commitment and fully integrated opportunity to learn and practice both formal and informal practice as part of weekly exercise, that practice is more likely to be durable. The approach presented here is a brief, five-week, introductory mindfulness curriculum called Mind-PLANK, designed for exercisers, and delivered as an adjunct to fitness class as an extension of post-workout recovery. The focus and intention of the curriculum is to de-mystify mindfulness by teaching some basic tools and tenets of practice so that they may be more easily incorporated as part of an overall healthy lifestyle.

Keywords: exercise, mindfulness, habit formation, brief curriculum

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Exposure to Mindfulness Basics Through Existing Habits: A Brief 5-Week Curriculum for Exercisers

Mindfulness and athletics have a symbiotic relationship, with top athletes and fitness enthusiasts alike recognizing the benefits of cultivating the mind-body connection. Tim Gallwey's (1974) groundbreaking book *The Inner Game of Tennis*, originally written almost 50 years ago, connected peak athletic performance and mental skills training. Since then, professional athletes and coaches at the height of their careers have lauded mindfulness and meditation as powerful and integral parts of their success (Brady, 2017; Green, 2011; Jackson, 2006; Mumford, 2015). Younger athletes in high school and college are also turning toward contemplative practice to help manage the pressure associated with competition itself and the added stress of balancing athletic expectations with other responsibilities (Saltzman, 2018), using mindful practice as both an extension and enhancement of their athleticism. Athletes across the competitive spectrum understand this valuable relationship between the mind and body and the importance of developing skills that strengthen and train both together. Yet, much of the athletic-related or athletic-specific conversation, curriculum, and programming centers around individual or team athletics and tends to focus on flow state, managing competition, and mindfulness as performance enhancement. All of this has value, particularly in the realm of competitive athletics.

Alternately, for those who simply value physical exercise as a crucial component of health and well-being, but train less rigorously and likely place fewer demands on the body and mind, mindfulness practice can still be tremendously beneficial in supporting a healthy lifestyle by helping to mitigate anxiety, decrease stress, regulate mood and live life more peacefully. The mind-body connection is such a natural starting point for exercisers, within the secular

environment of a gym or fitness facility, to learn, understand, and experience not only more embodied awareness during physical workouts themselves but also, and more importantly, as the vehicle by which exercisers can practice mindfulness in all facets of life outside of the gym.

This thesis explores the important connection between exercise and mindfulness practice, examines how habit-formation plays a key role in sustaining that connection, and discusses the efficacy of shorter, alternative mindfulness-based interventions. The existing literature and rationale inform the five-week curriculum, Mind-PLANK (included after the References section), intended for integration within a gym environment, ideally as adjunct instruction to the end of fitness classes. This curriculum offering is designed to introduce exercisers to mindfulness as an integrated part of a routine that can support overall personal health and wellbeing through exposure to basic mindfulness tenets within the group exercise space.

Exercise and Mindfulness

Buddhist philosophy points to contemplation (mindfulness) of the body (*kayanupassana*) as the First Foundation of Mindfulness, the beginning step on the path to awakening and enlightenment. Consequently, this connection between mind and body is deeply rooted in ancient movement practices such as Qi Gong, Tai Chi, and yoga. Conversely, Western gym environments and fitness facilities do not typically teach or focus on this connection as part of their modern class offerings, opting instead to promote more goal-driven benefits to exercise such as weight loss, muscle definition, or “feeling the burn.” While these goals, and ultimately any exercise regimen, are likely to achieve positive physical results when practiced regularly, they are often insular, with little attention paid to the mind or mental conditioning from a Buddhist perspective or otherwise.

Yet, even the Mayo Clinic (2022), world leaders in medical research and education, refer to generic, everyday exercise as “meditation in motion,” highlighting the connectivity between mental and physical fitness and the sense of release, reset, and calm that both can provide. Similarly, a National Health Institute survey determined that mindfulness meditation can foster participation in and enjoyment of physical activity (Strowger et al., 2018), recognizing both a starting point and potential road map for integrated exercise and meditation practice, seamlessly strengthening the mind alongside the body. This symbiosis indeed offers potential for exercisers, within the contemporary context of a gym or fitness facility, to be more specifically taught, and to have the firsthand experience with, cultivating a path of mindful awareness.

Integrating mindfulness and meditation within a fitness regimen can be a particularly effective way to support the exposure to and development of formal and informal mindful practice. George Mumford (2016) suggests, “You need to practice your sport or activity and you need a meditation practice, so that you work on your body and your mind simultaneously, building synergy between the two” (p. 164). Legendary NBA coach Phil Jackson (1995) refers more specifically to this synergy as the need to “turn down the chattering in my head and simply trust my body’s innate wisdom” (p. 26). This “synergy” and the “body’s innate wisdom” can inform the teaching of mindfulness within the context of the gym, so that exercisers may learn to bring more intentional awareness to the body during exercise to bolster the benefits of exercise itself, but more importantly, to become more regularly practiced in the tools and techniques that are the gateway to a more mindful life.

Thich Nhat Hanh (2015) explains the Buddha’s teachings in the *Satipatthana Sutta* on the First Foundation of Mindfulness (Mindfulness of the Body), the value of noticing how the body moves, becoming aware of each of the body’s distinct parts and features in order to ground

oneself in present-moment awareness. Thich Nhat Hanh (2015) notes, “When we are truly home, our body, mind, and feelings will be a place of refuge for ourselves and others” (p. 68). Arguably, both exercise and mindful practice together can be this place of refuge. Jon Kabat-Zinn (2013), in contemporizing the Buddha’s teaching in his fundamental book *Full Catastrophe Living*, details the necessity of the mind-body connection as a means to heal, grow, and change, both physically and mentally. He states, “we can no longer think about health as being solely characteristic of the body or the mind, because body and mind are not two separate domains – they are intimately interconnected and completely integrated” (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, p. 172). Exercisers often focus solely on the domain of the body but understand that regular strength-training and conditioning has a positive impact on their physicality – they feel it. Giving exercisers the opportunity to also condition the mind enables them to grow their mental muscles in tandem. And with any practice, seeing improvement through training is a metaphor that regular exercisers have experienced and can understand.

The similarities in physiological mechanisms responsible for feelings of release, relaxation, and calm after physical activity and mindfulness practice continue to be investigated, but there is no doubt a relationship between the fundamental mindfulness tenet of mind-body connection and exercise, both in terms of supporting a healthy lifestyle broadly and of experiencing some of the benefits of practice specifically. They support and inform one another. Meta-analyses of multiple studies have explored this relationship between mindfulness and physical activity, noting parallel positive outcomes related to emotional regulation, stress management, better sleep, psychological and cognitive functions, and a range of other beneficial health-related behaviors (Howarth et al., 2019; Sala et al., 2020; Yang & Conroy, 2020). Habitual exercisers and meditators just feel better when they practice. Yet, many of these studies

were conducted within the confines of a research space, not necessarily integrated into existing activities and routines, where more authentic mind-body connections may be more easily and organically made.

There are a number of studies that link positive, health-related behaviors to both mindfulness and physical fitness, both contributing to an increase in self-regulatory behaviors in exercisers. Oaten & Chang (2006) noted an improvement in self-regulation and a decrease in perceived stress amongst study participants after a two-month exercise program, contributing to healthier choices related to physical and mental well-being in relation to caffeine and alcohol use, spending habits, and decision-making around food choices. Similarly, a 125-study sample revealed a positive connection between trait mindfulness and behaviors generally associated with health and well-being such as physical activity, eating well, and improved sleep (Sala et al., 2020). In an analysis of five randomized control trials comparing the impact of meditation and exercise on various health-related factors, both may positively influence anxiety levels, perception of pain, and overall wellbeing (Edwards & Loprinzi, 2018). When looking at college students as a sub-group, there is also a connection between exercise motivation and mindfulness, both of which may promote lifestyle choices that contribute to healthy behavior (Neace et al., 2020).

Overall, this mind-body connection supports the concept that, “To locate and inhabit the domain of being, we need to learn and practice mobilizing our powers of attention and awareness while we are exercising” (Kabat-Zinn, 2015, p. 102). In an analysis of 13 studies representative of just under 4,000 participants, meditation practice and physical fitness show a number of positive, beneficial correlations between trait mindfulness and physicality including motivation and participation in physical activities (Yang & Conroy, 2020). This combination of both

physical and mental exercise through mindfulness may contribute to overall wellbeing, particularly in older adults (Tang et al., 2020). Similarly, a 2010 study (Ulmer) noted the association between mindfulness and acceptance in YMCA exercisers, who while not taught specific mindfulness skills as part of a study, were more motivated and committed to exercise due to their increased awareness.

Finally, important adjunct skills can be fostered through the mind-body connection inherent in exercise, including acceptance, self-compassion, and pain management. Often, exercise can be a very goal-driven endeavor, leading exercisers to focus more on “our preoccupation with how we look [and] a deep-seated insecurity about our bodies” (Kabat-Zinn, 2015, p. 75). But self-compassion, a key mindfulness tenet is tied to fostering self-improvement strategies by limiting this self-criticism, and instead cultivating a deeper sense of personal acceptance in each moment. This self-compassion can increase motivation (Breines & Chen, 2012), a crucial component in maintaining an active lifestyle through physical fitness. It is also considered an “emotion-focused coping strategy,” that when included as part of the framework of mindful attention, can promote kindness and acceptance of oneself (and ultimately others) through emotional regulation (Neff, 2003).

Additionally, injury and pain management, both frequent complications related to regular exercise, can be mitigated through mindful practice (Young, 2011). Much of injury prevention is related to paying attention to the body in the present moment and knowing when to push and when to back off. Jon Kabat-Zinn (2013) pointed out that, “Unawareness can keep us from being in touch with our own body, its signals and messages” (p. 25), which can lead exercisers to be out of touch with themselves during a workout, often to their detriment. But when athletes, or even regular, everyday exercisers “actually bringing their attention not to the game ahead, but to

the present moment: fully concentrating on their breathing, and in so doing, centering themselves in that calm place where they're able to be in touch with the space between stimulus and response" (Mumford, 2016, p. 102), this is a moment of mindful mind-body connection.

These connections highlight that, "There is no separating who you are on the court, field, or yoga mat from who you are in the world at large. That intrinsic wholeness serves you wherever you are and whatever you're doing. Everything is connected" (Mumford, 2008, p. 62). Bringing this connection directly to a fitness environment, through the routine of exercise is ripe with opportunity, and highlights a current gap in the integration of mindfulness instruction and existing habits.

Mindfulness and Healthy Habit Formation

Within the Buddhist domain, habits are typically considered destructive, as they are linked to behaviors that are perpetuated on autopilot, and without volition (Hanh, 2015). The lack of mindful awareness around the "doing" is identified as problematic within this Buddhist construct. The contemporary use of the word *habit* typically refers to a behavior "in a consistent and reoccurring everyday situation, which gradually increases the automaticity in which the behavior is initiated and performed" (Mantzios & Giannou, 2018, p. 523). Within this context, there is not necessarily a negative or positive connotation with the repetition itself, simply a frequency of the behavior as part of an established routine. Yet clearly, there are habits that are more beneficial than others. It is here, within everyday routines, that the teaching and practice of mindful awareness can flourish, by both allowing practitioners to identify and enhance habits that promote personal wellbeing, and bringing more conscious, mindful action to those habits themselves.

James Clear's (2018) text *Atomic Habits* details the value of making small, incremental modifications to existing routines that create durable new habits to promote positive growth and change. His concepts, based on decades of research into habit formation, can be applied to any learning and growth associated with assimilating a new skill, including mindfulness. In theory, small, manageable change and continued repetition create positive results that compound over time. Additionally, Clear (2018) notes the value of "habit stacking," adding a new behavior onto a very specific existing behavior to foster retention. Physical exercise is one such existing habit that could be enhanced by adding a mindfulness component to an existing exercise regimen, seamlessly integrating mindfulness and meditation practice into that routine through the mind-body connection. From a mindfulness perspective, this idea of *habit stacking* is similar to how Thich Nhat Hanh (1975) describes engaging in informal mindfulness practice as part of an everyday activity such as dishwashing. The key is accessibility and frequency, cultivating mindful awareness by making it an integral part of daily life.

The results of a 2015 study (Hanley et al.) bolstered this connection between heightened awareness and everyday tasks, actually using instruction in mindful dishwashing as the experimental control and, supporting their hypothesis that such mindful practice increased positive affect and decreased negative associations with the task itself. "That these changes were associated with the coupling of mindful practice with an everyday task is a novel finding" (Hanley et al., 2015, p. 1101), and informs how mindfulness instruction could be introduced in other common settings. Neal et al. (2012), while not studying mindfulness specifically, also noted that context cues play an important role in "triggering behavior," allowing for positive associations between the habit itself and routine activities. Given that exercise can sometimes be perceived as a chore, even for those who may regularly exercise, this finding has unique

potential within the physical fitness space to support both the introduction of practice and the enjoyment of both practice and exercise jointly.

Linking new, healthy behaviors or practices by using existing cues can also help make these new practices more durable (Gardner et al. 2012; Lally et al., 2011), supporting the *habit stacking* concept by adding a new behavior (mindfulness) onto a very specific existing behavior (physical exercise) to foster retention. As Lea et al. (2020) point out, “intimate bodily experiences are invariably situated within wider space-time routines and contexts, which variously support the development of new habits or making existing habits more robust,” further noting the potential value of “reflexive practices (such as mindfulness meditation) within the “habitual structures of everyday life” (p. 61).

This “small change” approach has been postulated as a way to promote and sustain other health-related initiatives (Hill, 2008), and supports the idea of using an existing habit, in this case, going to the gym or exercising, as a way to trigger a specific behavior, such as mindful awareness. There is also a growing body of evidence to suggest that shorter mindfulness instruction and practice can be equally effective in initiating and improving mindfulness as a habit and this habit-formation may have the potential to be more durable if shorter practices are coupled with existing routines (Mantzios & Giannou, 2019). Physical exercise is one such existing routine that could be enhanced by a targeted curriculum, designed specifically for the fitness space, providing exercisers basic mindfulness techniques in digestible bites as part of their exercise program.

Existing Curricula and Mindfulness Interventions

The idea of shorter and arguably more easily learned and practiced mindfulness instruction runs counter to the way that most mindful meditation practice is currently taught. Jon

Kabat-Zinn's (1990) Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program (MBSR) detailed in *Full Catastrophe Living* has become the foundational program from which overwhelmingly other curricula, particularly those intended for adults, are developed and facilitated. These programs, of which positive results are increasingly more documented, still rely on participation as a stand-alone entity, typically a course that is *other* or *additional*, but not integrated into an existing routine. And this mindfulness instruction, like the acquisition of any new habit, requires a bit of a leap of faith and motivation to participate, or perhaps even a doctor's encouragement (Gardner et al., 2012).

Many programs also require a fairly significant time commitment up-front, with instruction typically dominating a couple to a few hours per week and additional requirements of homework in the form of daily practice, with further instruction to then connect that practice to existing routines. Of the 32 teacher trainings and programs reviewed on Positive Psychology's website (2017) the vast majority require a significant time-commitment in the form of many hours per week of coursework, homework, and practice. For adults, mindfulness training and programming in a more traditional classroom model, including in-person didactic and homework requirements, tend to be based on the original MBSR coursework, typically 8-10 weeks of multi-hour instruction and practice (Kabat-Zinn et al., 2017; Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

There are a number of online, "drop-in" learning and practice opportunities through various retreat centers and the like, but they too are typically at least an hour or more in duration and designed as stand-alone entities. There are a few exceptions in the online space that are providing shorter programming such as the Cambridge Insight Meditation Center (2022), whose "Dharma in Daily Life" drop-in is 15-minutes in length, inclusive of a brief dharma talk followed by guided practice, but their "Beginner's Drop In" is still an hour long. Both Headspace and

Calm, two of the most popular mindfulness apps (Eisenstadt et al., 2021), have shorter instruction available in the form of their “Basics” course and “7 Days of Calm,” respectively. Similarly, Mindfulness.com (2022) is currently offering a 10-week online course with 15-20 minutes sessions, geared toward the beginner. There is increasingly more research on the efficacy of these types of app-based interventions, but initial studies suggest positive outcomes linked to emotional regulation and overall wellbeing (Eisenstadt et al., 2021). Still, these app-based courses lack personal interaction and opportunity for dialogue with an instructor or other practitioners, therefore requiring initial initiative and continued personal motivation for participation, and without the benefit of a supportive, like-minded community.

While there is no doubt tremendous appeal in these offerings, evidenced by their increased popularity and availability, the lack of integration into existing routines could be a potential barrier to both entry and continuity. When mindfulness practice is authentically linked to its inherent ability to connect body and mind, it cannot be separated from daily routines, potentially supporting the formation of new routines, or bolstering existing ones (Lea et al., 2015), and potentially exposing an even broader audience to the benefits of mindfulness.

There also continues to be much study and debate over the proper dosage of mindfulness intervention required for such interventions to be deemed effective. It is encouraging that options are becoming increasingly more abundant that address availability, practicality, and efficacy. Yet additional study around “short,” “brief,” and “modified” programming is warranted as there is limited clarity on the details of many of these mindfulness-based interventions. Of the research surrounding efficacy of MBSR (or MBSR-related) programs, analysis of a number of studies with adults suggests that modifying program requirements by shortening the time commitment does not lessen their effectiveness, at least in relation to decrease of psychological stress, if not

other regulating factors (Carmody & Baer, 2009). Similarly, a systematic review of recent research across multiple databases indicates that mindfulness interventions of varying lengths and time-commitments can be useful in contributing to a wide range of behavioral modifications, including reduced mind wandering (Rahl et al., 2017), the reduction of implicit racial bias through loving-kindness meditation (Stell & Farsides, 2016), and a reduction in anxiety, stress, and symptoms of depression (Chiodelli et al., 2020), all positive correlations to practice.

Modifications to longer interventions show efficacy in improving sleep, decreasing stress, and increasing mindfulness and self-compassion. The *Koru* mindfulness program (Greeson et al., 2014; Smit & Stavroulaki, 2021) is one such example that requires only 10 minutes of meditation practice as “homework.” Another abbreviated, five-week curricula called “Mindful-Gym” supports the durability and accessibility of mindfulness techniques in shorter formats (Kar et al., 2014). The most beneficial and memorable component of this larger program, according to the medical students in Malaysia who participated, was a mini-mindfulness mnemonic embedded in the curriculum called *Mindful-S.T.O.P.* that helped remind the medical students to pause and call upon newly learned mindfulness techniques to help mitigate stress. In a subsequent study on the program’s effectiveness, researchers concluded that the skills taught decreased perceived stress and mental distress, and increased mindfulness and self-efficacy, the latter still relevant six months after the conclusion of the training (Phang et al., 2015).

Similar brevity and flexibility was built into other studies, one using 15-minutes of guided instruction via audio-tape over the course of a week (Banks et al., 2015), where participants were instructed to practice when it suited them throughout the day, giving them agency over the instruction and the ability to incorporate short, yet effective practice into their existing routines, and another using 20-minutes of group practice over the course of five days

(Tang et al., 2007). Both were simple and effective in increasing self-regulation and attention and decreasing stress despite the shorter time commitment.

Time modifications are also standard in the most popular programming for children, adolescents, and young adults where coursework relies on shorter, more flexible lessons ranging from 10 to 30 minutes and typically delivered no more than once or twice weekly within the context of existing routines, such as the beginning and end of the school day, or as a transition between daily activities or subjects. Age-appropriate curricula accommodate shorter attention spans and consider time constraints inherent in the school day, but all have similar objectives related to exposing kids to mindful practice within the context of their daily activities. As with adults, studies support this integration as a means to decrease stress and anxiety, regulate behavior, increase concentration and attention, and promote acceptance of self and others (Biegel & Corbin, 2018; Broderick, 2013; Cattley & Lavelle, n.d.; Dvořáková et al., 2017; Mindful Schools, 2013). The work and research of child psychologist and mindfulness educator Chris Willard (2006) also supports that interventions limiting the duration of practice in favor of shorter lessons are no less effective in conveying fundamental mindfulness skills and encouraging the development of mindfulness as a lifelong practice.

In relation to fitness, there are existing programs dedicated to connecting mindfulness and competitive athletic performance, but they are more traditional in length and specifically geared to athletes in either team or individual sport, not broadly designed for general exercisers or wellness enthusiasts (Beigel & Corbin, 2018; Kaufman et al., 2018; Saltzman, 2018). This presents an opportunity to fill that gap by offering a dedicated curriculum linking the healthy habit of exercise with mindfulness within the gym directly, not only as introductory exposure to

practice, but also as a springboard for more robust, continued mindfulness practice in all aspects of life.

Discussion

In *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (1975) Thich Nhat Hanh outlines the accessibility of mindful practice to anyone, noting that it can and should be intimately woven and integrated through the experiences, observations, and personal relationships of each day. Specifically, Thich Nhat Hanh's guidance is that "one must practice right now in one's daily life, not only during meditation sessions" (p. 12), pointing to the importance and distinction of both formal and informal practice. This concept is contemporized in the research of Lea et al. (2015) who looked "to understand how [mindfulness practice] is situated within the wider everyday habits (including space-time routines) which constitute the ebb and flow of participants' daily lives. The emphasis in both cases is that practice is intrinsically linked and available to anyone *right now* in all aspects of life. But what does that look like for someone who does not know the first thing about mindfulness or meditation? How does one begin a practice and make it part of an authentic routine? This is a distinct challenge given the overwhelmingly busy and stressful world we live in, so this very real barrier to practice is twofold: 1) how to "make time" to learn and understand what mindfulness is and how to practice; and 2) how to do so in a way that enables sustained practice so that it becomes a wholly integrated and authentic way to experience life, a way of *being*, not simply something else to *do*. Ultimately, that is both the value of practice and the practice itself.

If mindfulness teachers (facilitators, coaches), first take into consideration what a person's daily life already looks like, how they fill their time, what they value, and then offer practice as an extension of those existing routines, facilitation becomes truly holistic for both

teacher and student as they “repeat a chosen behavior in the same context, until it becomes automatic and effortless” (Gardner et al., 2012). This fostering of a “habituation of cues (or situations) to reach an asymptote of automaticity represents a novel approach to lifestyle change and incorporation of mindful lifestyle” (Mantzios & Giannou, 2019, p. 523). Mindfulness instruction that is brought *to* familiar regimens, incorporated into an environment that is already commonplace, becomes an invitation for those practices to grow, become more valuable, authentic, and therefore more durable, especially for beginners.

In this regard, mindfulness instruction based truly in “meeting people where they are at,” can be better facilitated not only with the understanding of habit and routine, but also through taking into consideration the physical spaces people inhabit. Bringing a mindfulness offering or intervention *to* a specific population of people, *within* a particular space, offers an alternative to how practice is typically taught, as often beginning exposure to practice is in a setting that is “other” and removed from daily life. Exposing beginners to practice is better facilitated in an already familiar, shared physical space, within the context of an experience that is already valued, or through a task or responsibility that is frequently attended to as part of daily life. Then, the idea of both exposure and practice itself becomes more organic, more easily explained, and less daunting to simply try.

This concept was similarly studied in cancer patients who learned mindfulness as an adjunct to chemotherapy sessions to help cope with the extreme stress associated with both the treatment and illness itself. The experimental group was taught a simple, five-minute mindful breathing exercise, and after that guidance, they were then instructed to practice three times per day at a time of their choosing outside of the treatment facility (Chui et al., 2021). Despite having the same baseline scores for both mindfulness and perceived stress, three months post-intervention

the experimental group reported a continued significant decrease in stress and increase in mindfulness (Chui et al., 2021) with continued use of the techniques as part of their own routines. The results of this study are interesting in several ways and relevant to the idea of mindful instruction within a known environment. It shows the effectiveness of teaching a simple, brief, yet fundamental practice, associated with both a particular usefulness (such as behavior regulation or stress reduction), and linked to an existing regimen.

This same concept translates into the fitness space, as I have seen firsthand in my work at two different fitness facilities in Northern Massachusetts. TDAE, owned and operated by Tim DiFrancesco, Doctor of Physical Therapy and former Head Strength Coach for the Los Angeles Lakers, and FORM, where Lauren Kennedy, Certified Health Coach and Personal/Group Fitness Trainer, teaches. Both Tim and Lauren are fitness professionals who focus on functional strength and training, skills that safely build endurance and promote longevity to support healthy aging. As novice mindfulness practitioners, they also recognize the need for more authentic mind-body connections to support the mental component of training and wellbeing.

While mind and body are inextricably linked within the context of contemporary exercise routines, exercisers are not necessarily aware and attuned to this connection and mindfulness is not a typical codified component of fitness programming within the industry, despite “mindful exercise” being frequently touted on fitness websites and blogs. Tim, Lauren, and I (along with my co-teacher at TDAE, Becky DiFrancesco) wanted to integrate mindfulness practice authentically, not as an over-simplified or trendy buzzword for getting more out of a workout, but through more holistic offerings. The results of this experimentation within the fitness space represent the development of the Mind-PLANK curriculum included at the end of this thesis.

While relatively brief (five, 20-minute units), Mind-PLANK includes didactic instruction on mindful mindset, provides time for experiential practice, and fosters the cultivation of acceptance, not only for the body, but also for the mind, to better support mental and physical wellbeing through the teaching of specific, fundamental practices such as breath awareness, body scan, and mindful eating, alongside the concepts of acceptance, non-judgment, and compassion towards oneself and others. The lessons themselves are reflective of existing mindfulness offerings, but the incorporation of practice as an extension of the workout, along with some fitness-specific language and cueing, is particularly unique. Importantly, it is intended to be taught in-person after a workout to better support and foster a positive, community atmosphere. This in and of itself represents an important shift away from the often exclusive or potentially intimidating nature of gym environments, prioritizing community, non-judgment, and the common interest of improved health over physical comparisons and interpersonal competition.

Tim's (personal communication, June 6, 2022) mission statement, *to empower as many people as we can to be healthier and stronger so they can enjoy doing what they love*, dovetails with this mindset. He understands how mindfulness practice supports the whole person, making it an ideal complement to fitness work in a multitude of ways. At TDAE, instruction and practice during weekly staff meetings allows for a much-needed respite, as "human-to-human service providing is very draining and helping people is hard work," but it has also informed and improved "how you coach and how you experience your own workouts." Mindfulness practice has enhanced the team's coaching skills, "allowing them to better recognize the small details of various exercises and movements by paying more close attention to what's happening on the gym floor. To be able to help somebody, you have to be aware of your surroundings, and aware of helping people to connect to where they are feeling an exercise in order to adjust little things

to even get more out of it.” But for Tim and his staff, the real value of mindfulness practice has been the ability to reflect on the bigger picture:

There’s so many people who go a lifetime of fitness and working out of just thinking that all that they’re attempting to obtain or achieve in any workout is to feel a burn, to burn a calorie, to break a sweat, and [gain] an aesthetic objective, but then you get this moment to step back, debrief on what you just did, think about how it felt, and then notice progress, that’s the biggest benefit - to be aware and recognize different ways that progress is happening.

And just as he sees clients’ relationships with exercise change over time with consistency, he feels the same about his own growing practice, “Getting these [mindful] strategies, practicing it in moments in my day when it fits, is really powerful.”

Similarly, Lauren and I have partnered to offer exercisers in her 45-minute “Tread Express” class (a circuit training workout combining cardio work on treadmills interspersed with floor exercises using weights) to stay a bit longer for mindfulness meditation instruction and practice. For Lauren (personal communication, June 4, 2022), mindfulness practice at the end of her class brings a valuable addition to post-workout recovery. She notes, “You’ve already done the [physical] work. You’ve sweat. And to sit with yourself afterwards, I am even more calm and focused.” The consistency and brevity of the after-class offering has made mindful practice turnkey. “If you make fitness a priority and then you add on the meditation, that will also become a priority, especially in small doses. Adding a couple of minutes each week has been a great addition.”

There is a component of this beneficial habit formation in contemporary life that cannot be removed from wanting to feel a sense of reward (or at least forward progress) when adding or

modifying routines to support health and wellbeing (Clear, 2018). “Habits often originate in goal pursuit, given that people are likely to repeat actions that are rewarding or yield desired outcomes” (Neal et al., 2012, p. 492). On the surface, this idea of accomplishment in relation to mindful habit-formation seems finite and favors a product over process approach, putting it at odds with the concepts of non-striving and non-goal orientation in the Buddhist underpinnings of modern practice. Yet, this perceived conflict can be a teachable moment within a well-crafted, secular mindfulness program for exercisers, not through an explanation of Buddhist philosophy explicitly, but by shifting the focus away from goals to the more subtle, yet equally valuable idea of *intention* as a way to foster mental and physical health. Particularly within the fitness space, intention can be a much more supportive way to motivate exercisers to focus on the mindset of routine effort over goal setting, in terms of prioritizing both consistent physical exercise and mindful practice. This too is a subtle shift in how many gyms and training facilities approach fitness. Still, intention better supports sustainable practice inside and outside of the gym, in relation to both physical exercise and mindfulness.

In the Mind-PLANK curriculum, lessons are framed through the lens of intention, and are comprised of both formal and informal mindfulness practice, paralleling how exercisers can understand and experience their workouts. For example, someone may participate in a regular exercise class or work with a coach or trainer (formal), but also be cognizant of keeping active outside the gym by taking walks, choosing the stairs over the elevator, and incorporating movement into the day as much as possible (informal). That continued informal activity and intention support and sustains a cycle of using the body, feeling positive about using the body, and continuing to do so outside the structure of the gym. Yet, in relation to mindfulness, it is

exactly this lack of more informal practice and everyday life associations that is less studied (Hanley et al., 2015), particularly in relation to present-moment awareness and intentions.

While there is a notable research gap in understanding how mindfulness instruction may positively impact motivation to participate in physical activity (Yang & Conroy, 2020), dedicated mindfulness programming, such as Mind-PLANK, within the fitness space should be examined more closely for efficacy and durability to determine the benefits of mindfulness practice as an adjunct to an existing healthful exercise habit. While further study is warranted, it appears that an important feedback loop is created, with exercise and mindfulness supporting and encouraging habitual, beneficial mental and physical practices.

Conclusion

Habit formation and the mind-body connection inherent in both mindfulness practice and physical exercise can inform authentic programming that capitalizes on meeting exercisers where they are at, both physically and mentally to enhance their training, but even more importantly, to provide meaningful opportunities for mindful practice outside of the gym. Broadly, the development of programming for various interest groups supports Jon Kabat-Zinn's (2003) own reflections on the development of adaptive mindfulness-based interventions over time. He noted:

the inherent flexibility of the curriculum in terms of both content and delivery and yet its reliance on essential core meditative practices grounded in silence, stillness, self-inquiry, embodiment, emotional sensitivity, and acceptance of the full gamut of emotional expression held in awareness (all practices that shape and inform the intervention and its unfolding at every level); and finally, its acknowledgment of the universal longing in people for happiness, well-being, resilience, and peace of mind, body and soul, and how

that longing might be effectively met, honored, and mobilized for transformation among program participants (p. 153).

Further modifications within the context of physical fitness and exercise within a gym environment or training facility is warranted, particularly in relation to how beginners to mindfulness practice might be introduced to tools and skills that cultivate and provide continued opportunity for ongoing practice. Mindful awareness can be developed and investigated through programming that facilitates positive health outcomes through integrating mindfulness and established exercise routines. Exercise itself is a crucial component in an overall healthy lifestyle, but there is added benefit from learning and practicing both formal and informal mindfulness skills within the context of that exercise and part of healthy habit-formation. If the seeds of mindfulness and the myriad opportunity for practice are planted in the fertile soil of everyday habits, they will be more likely to take root and grow.

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Mind-PLANK

Curriculum Guide

5 weekly, 20-minute mindfulness lessons for exercisers

From the Author

When people learn that I teach and practice mindfulness meditation, they inevitably say, “I could never do that. I could never make my thoughts disappear (clear my mind, empty my head, stop spinning, quiet my mind, etc.)” or “I could never sit cross-legged for hours in silence.” Before my own exposure to practice, those likely would have been my responses as well. The reality is that many people have heard the word *mindfulness*, but that doesn’t mean they intellectually or experientially understand what it is, what it’s not, how to “do” it, or why it’s valuable. And starting something new can be daunting, even more so if it seems intimidating, confusing, or even off-putting. I wanted to change that by bringing practice to experiences that are already routine for people, so that an immediate connection is made between life and practice.

My personal goal is to make practice accessible to anyone by helping them discover, through meeting them where they are at, how much richer and more balanced life becomes when lived with heightened awareness, acceptance, and gratitude. By looking at mindfulness as another potentially healthy habit, it feels more do-able in a small, manageable way, with simple and clear explanations of the basics, to create a foundational, accessible beginner practice. I’m confident that this initial exposure makes the idea of both formal and informal practice realistic within the constraints of a likely already hectic schedule and fosters an environment that

encourages the relevance and applicability of mindfulness for anyone and everyone within all aspects of daily life.

So, if you're already making time for regular exercise (even attending a fitness class or gym once or twice per week), I want to encourage you to add a bit more to your cool-down and recovery by staying for mindfulness instruction. I have been a regular exerciser for years and started on my own mindfulness path when an injury sidelined me from my favorite yoga class. It wasn't until I was without yoga practice that I truly understood, and missed, the intrinsic mind-body connection and sense of calm inherent in that practice. So, I downloaded an app, ordered some books online, and through fits and starts slowly built my mindful meditation practice. And in times when my formal mindfulness practice may wane, physical activity always helps to break me out of that negative cycle and bring me back to the present moment. I've learned that I value equally exercise for both my body and mind, strengthening them together as part of a routine of self-care, stress relief, and overall wellbeing. I just feel better all-around when I practice and when I move, so I want to share the benefits of this powerful partnership.

Having worked in the fitness space with individuals and coaches, teaching mindful practice has been quite seamless, and a natural extension of training. But I've found that while there are a growing number of resources and curriculum that connect sport and athletic performance with mindfulness practice, many are geared towards people who already consider themselves to be athletes, or competitors, whether individually or as part of team. My approach is slightly different, in that the fitness environment is the shared space and community gathering place through which a practice is established and supported, with the connection to the body being the starting point. And in a fitness setting, exercisers are already

used to guidance from a trainer or instructor to improve their physical strength, stamina, and health, so the addition of a mindfulness coach to support and train the mind is a natural next step.

Introduction

Mind-PLANK is a 5-week beginner mindfulness curriculum for exercisers that focuses on introducing fundamental mindfulness practice as an extension of established fitness routines. The 20-minute modules are inclusive of both best practices for secular mindfulness instruction and lessons that have resonated with my own students while facilitating individual and group instruction within the fitness space. Mindfulness practitioners will recognize many of the lessons and practices, so in that way, it is similar to other courses. A subtle difference is that the *Mind-PLANK* lessons extend and transition directly from the fitness class as part of the post-workout recovery time, with particular attention and gratitude towards acceptance of the body. Fitness environments can sometimes create anxiety, and exercisers may be self-critical of their abilities or their physiques. Mindfulness can be a supportive antidote for that judgment of oneself and others.

The curriculum is intended to be taught by experienced mindfulness practitioners, all of whom should have both an established mindfulness practice and an academic and theoretical understanding of mindfulness. Given that there is some flexibility built into the modules, allowing them to be executed in a slightly shorter amount of time (20 minutes, at minimum) or extended by increasing the length of the guided practice time and/or dialogue, a skilled practitioner will be able to modify accordingly based on their unique situation. Still, the

intention of *Mind-PLANK* is that it is relatively brief and therefore ideally manageable for anyone to try.

The *Mind-PLANK* curriculum guide includes:

- Information on the Relevance of the Name: *Mind-PLANK*
- Note to Gym Owners, Trainers, Coaches, and Fitness Programmers
- Note to Mindfulness Facilitators
- Note About Inclusion
- Note to Exercisers – Why You Should Participate in *Mind-PLANK*
(to be distributed to participants)
- Five Scaffolded Lessons: **Pause, Letting Go, Awareness, Non-Judgment, Kindness**
- Post-Program Assessment Tool

Relevance of the Name: *Mind-PLANK*

The name of the curriculum – *Mind-PLANK* – is layered in meaning and intended to clearly call out the mind-body connection, both in the fitness space and more deeply, as a reminder of the balance inherent in a mindful life. The plank position itself is balance embodied, with the back strong and even, the eyes downcast, the breathing steady. It is considered an optimal, total-body exercise that combines the body and mind in harmony. When executed properly, it engages many major muscles groups, particularly by supporting increased strength and stability through the trunk and core, where we often notice our breath. Like mindfulness, it also requires attention, awareness, and is not dependent on equipment. Like mindful meditation practice, even beginners can practice plank pose, increasing the duration as practitioners build their stamina and tolerance.

A Note to Gym Owners, Trainers, Coaches, and Fitness Programmers:

The *Mind-PLANK* curriculum is designed as a brief (5-week, 20 minutes/week), introductory mindfulness experiential for exercisers, meant to be taught by an experienced mindfulness practitioner. Ideally, it should be consistently scheduled at the end of workout class as an extension of the cool-down and recovery time. Practically, this means that the fitness instructor would transition/hand off the cool down period to the mindfulness coach who would then lead the mindfulness instruction portion of the class (notes/sample script on this transition are included in the curriculum). Within the designated mindfulness period of 15-30 minutes post-class, each *Mind-PLANK* lesson introduces a mindfulness concept through instruction, provides time for formal mindful meditation practice, allows for dialogue (question and answer), and offers guidance on both formal and informal practice outside of the fitness space.

Alternately, the *Mind-PLANK* curriculum can be used weekly as a stand-alone mini-workshop offered to exercisers within the fitness space. In terms of habit formation and routine-building, there is a benefit to linking the program directly to the recovery portion of the workout, but connections can still be made if this programming is offered separately and tied to a broader fitness experience or community of exercisers (for example as an added benefit or bonus when a client joins the gym). Similarly, *Mind-PLANK* can be offered as modules within a high school physical education program. All options are intended to expose exercisers who are novices to the benefits of mindfulness practice to support and improve workouts, but more importantly, to encourage mindfulness practice as part of an overall healthy lifestyle.

During the instruction and meditation, participants will be asked to find a comfortable seated or prone position. The availability of mats, chairs, Bosu balls or physio balls within the space may provide comfortable options for participants, but there is no specific or additional equipment needed for mindfulness practice. An experienced mindfulness practitioner should be able to provide appropriate modifications accordingly based on the participant group. From a programming perspective, at least 20 minutes should be scheduled within the actual space (room, location) to allow for proper time and transition from class to mindfulness instruction prior to the next programming block.

A Note to Mindfulness Facilitators:

A skillful teacher will bring in any number of things as appropriate to inform and round out the teaching, dialogue, and practice itself, drawing on his or her extensive professional and personal knowledge base, temperament, and skills.

Jon Kabat-Zinn

Just as exercisers benefit from being properly coached in physical fitness endeavors by trainers who are properly educated and both understand and exercise themselves, this mindfulness offering is meant to be taught by skilled, experienced practitioners who have their own established and consistent practice. As such, the weekly content is likely familiar to you. The curriculum itself is secular, intended to have broad appeal, and flexible enough in design to accommodate various beginner practitioners. It is intended to be an introduction to mindfulness practice, and a springboard for future and continued practice.

Mind-PLANK is comprised of five weekly lesson plans, each containing an overview of the key learnings, essential questions to consider each week, and both a formal and informal practice (skill). Each lesson contains five sections: transition, didactic instruction, guided

practice, dialogue (Q&A), and instructions for at-home practice. The At-Home Practice section should be printed out and distributed to participants at the end of each class, or sent via text/email, whatever is most feasible in your particular situation. Also included in Lesson 1 and Lesson 5 is a link to the Mindful Awareness Scale, which similarly should be made available to each participant. Each in-person section includes a sample script. Still, I encourage you to adjust any lessons accordingly based on your own embodied practice and understanding of your participants interests and experiences. There is room for facilitator notes at bottom of each section should you choose to keep track of any changes.

The inclusion of some resource materials at the end of Lesson 5 allows participants to explore additional avenues for study upon the conclusion of the program. These are some of my personal favorites, but do not scratch the surface in terms of available resources for teachers and students. I encourage you to add or share your own with your participants. I have also included some references to the Buddhist roots of mindfulness practice. While Buddhism is addressed briefly in Lesson 1 as context for contemporary mindfulness practice, the shortened time-frame does not allow for robust study, which may be interesting to some participants, but certainly not compulsory.

Mind-PLANK Outline:

- Lesson 1: **P** = Pause
- Lesson 2: **L** = Letting Go
- Lesson 3: **A** = Awareness
- Lesson 4: **N** = Non-Judgment
- Lesson 5: **K** = Kindness & Compassion

A Note About Inclusion

I encourage Mindfulness Facilitators interested in using the *Mind-PLANK* curriculum to be creative about fitness-related spaces that would benefit from this offering. There is a wide spectrum of environments that offer programming for all ages, communities, and affinity groups. Often, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs, local community spaces, recreation centers, and the like offer free or deeply discounted fitness memberships and access to exercise programming. On the other end of the spectrum, there are more expensive, custom, and personalized fitness facilities with varying membership costs. It is important to remember that any exerciser can benefit from understanding the value of the mind-body connection and the addition of mindful practice to the end of a workout. You may naturally gravitate to where you feel a connection and fit based on your own professional goals, interests, and whether you provide your teaching services free of charge or require a fee. The curriculum is intended to be an adaptable resource. Use it in a way that resonates for you and your students.

Note to Exercisers – Why You Should Participate in *Mind-PLANK*

Changing habits is hard work, but it doesn't have to be painful.

Dr. Jud Brewer – Neuroscientist and Mindfulness Researcher

As exercisers, we understand the concept that regular physical training both in and out of the gym produces results. Without training, we can't expect to increase our strength and stamina or improve how we feel about ourselves. We don't start by lifting the heaviest weight on the rack or running a marathon, but instead progress incrementally, acclimating our bodies with exercises that become second nature the more that we train. Over time, those muscles

that were at first sore and angry at the newness of weight and movement, become stronger and more accustomed to the challenge. With consistency and dedication, we can improve our physical health, and this commitment to training builds on itself. Exercise makes us feel good when we do it and begin to understand that adage “use it or lose it.” When we fall out of a routine and neglect exercise for any period of time, we often realize how much we missed it when we do return to it.

Just as our bodies can change and adapt to physical exercise, our brains are also capable of positive growth and change. While scientists once believed that our brain development stopped when we reached adulthood, we now know that the brain can continue to change and adapt throughout our lives as it is exposed to different stimuli and experiences. This is called neuroplasticity, or in other words, the ability to teach old dogs new tricks. This is particularly exciting when it comes to understanding the positive effects of mindfulness and meditation on the brain.

[Dr. Sarah Lazar’s lab](#) at Harvard studies the impact of meditation on practitioners. Overwhelmingly, her research suggests that “meditation can produce experience-based structural alterations in the brain” and there is “evidence that meditation may slow down the age-related atrophy of certain areas of the brain” (Lazar Lab, Harvard University, 2021). When we meditate, we activate the mental muscles of focus, concentration, and awareness, which help strengthen our tolerance and improve our ability to better regulate our behavior. Meditation can also reduce stress, manage anxiety, and generally support a more positive outlook on life. Just like physical exercise, it’s beneficial both in the moment and preventatively as a way to build our mental resilience. Meditation also teaches us to consider ourselves and

our experiences with more kindness and compassion, allowing us to feel more balanced and less overwhelmed.

Mindfulness and meditation practice builds our mental muscles in much the same way we build our physical ones. In all likelihood, your brain is a muscle you've been overlooking in your training, but it will respond to practice and routine. That's where Mind-PLANK comes in. This 5- week program offers an introduction to mindfulness and meditation practice as an extension of the recovery part of your workout. The simple techniques and instruction are designed to help you understand, and more importantly, PRACTICE, adding mindfulness to your already beneficial exercise routine. And while these few lessons will expose you to the basics, they are intended to set you on a course for integrating mindful practice in all aspects of your life, both in and out of the gym. Hopefully, this is just the beginning.

*Adapted from: <https://blog.tdathletesedge.com/mental-muscles>
Meredith Tedford, December 2021*

CURRICULUM GUIDE

Lessons: 1 – 5

Mind-PLANK: Session 1 - “PAUSE”

Exercisers will have initial exposure to the most fundamental component of mindfulness practice by considering the power and potential in learning how to PAUSE.

Key Learnings:

- Beginning to cultivate gratitude for the physical body
- Working definitions of mindfulness and meditation
- Formal and informal practice
- Anchors of Attention
- Practicing with the breath as an “anchor of attention” and a way to PAUSE

Unit Essential Questions:

1. What does it feel like to extend the recovery time of your workout and intentionally PAUSE?
2. Can you begin to notice when the mind wanders?
3. How might you begin to incorporate PAUSE into your everyday routine through formal and informal practice?

Practices:

- Formal: Awareness of Breath Meditation
- Informal: PAUSE 1-2-3

Notes for the Mindfulness Coach:

Coordinate with the fitness coach to transition from active workout time to recovery. This may mean assisting with putting equipment away, allowing exercisers to get a drink of water, or putting mats out for sitting. Then, encourage exercisers to settle and transition to this extended recovery time as they rest in a comfortable position. Introduce yourself and welcome participants to Week 1.

TRANSITION

(5 Minutes)

Welcome & Housekeeping

- As you get settled and transition from your workout take a few deep breaths: breathing in gratitude for the physical exercise you were able to do today, not what you weren't able to do, simply gratitude for this time to strengthen the body, and breathing out calm for this time to recover more deeply from your workout.
- And as you sit, take a few moments to just notice any sensations in the body post-workout. Just noticing how the body feels after exercise.
- Over the course of the next 5 weeks, we will be taking this time to practice how to strengthen the mind alongside the body to support your health and wellbeing, using our senses, and awareness of our senses in relation to our bodies, to help ground us in the present moment so that we are more balanced.
- This course is called *Mind-PLANK*, and PLANK is an acronym for 5 tenets of mindfulness practice – Pause, Letting Go, Awareness, Non-Judgment, and Kindness & compassion. We'll be exploring a new topic each week.
- You're likely all familiar with a plank in physical fitness, but over the course of the next five weeks we'll be practicing PLANK for our minds. You'll be learning some various concepts, practices, and techniques that like physical exercise, will be more beneficial if you do them regularly, both here, and on your own.
- Like physical exercise, mindfulness practice can become part of a healthy routine, something that you can incorporate into your day and your daily habits. Mindfulness is a practice that will become unique to you.
- I also want you to know that this is a safe, supportive, welcoming space. This is a judgment-free space. All experiences are welcome, and I am here for questions and support.
- So, what is mindfulness? Well, its history is rooted in Buddhist philosophy that has been practiced for more than 2500 years. This practice is not religious in and of itself but is instead a way of experiencing the world, and anything that you do, including exercise, more skillfully and with more awareness. How we practice today, and what you'll learn is a secular, contemporary interpretation of that ancient practice.
- You've actually all been practicing mindfulness without realizing it just by listening (using the sense of hearing/listening) to me talk for the past couple of minutes. And likely, as I've been speaking, you drifted away to something else – a task you needed to remember to attend to, a sound in the room, a feeling in your body, anything – and then, you realized that you weren't paying attention to me, and you brought yourself back to my voice and what I'm saying. The recognition that you've drifted away is a mindful moment. Bringing yourself back to my voice and this instruction is an example of mindful practice.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

Session 1 (continued)
DIDACTIC INSTRUCTION
(7 minutes)

- So, **Mindfulness** means paying attention, being fully engaged in and aware of the present moment, whatever that moment may be.
- Mindfulness is NOT clearing our heads of all of the thoughts and feelings and emotions that we have. It's not making our mind a blank slate.
- It IS learning to develop a different relationship with those thoughts, feelings, and emotions so that we don't get carried away by them. Pausing helps us to do that. Practicing PAUSE – the first tenet of *Mind-PLANK* - builds that skill.
- Another important component of mindfulness is kindness and curiosity about whatever thoughts, feelings, or sensations exist. It is an awareness without judgment, an acceptance of yourself first, and then others. This is important, as we are often our own worst critics of both our bodies and minds.
- We'll talk more about this as the weeks progress, but for now, we're going to think of mindfulness PAUSING so that we can notice and become more aware.
- And when we're more mindfully aware, we are better able to skillfully manage and regulate our responses to our environment. When we are mindful, we are more tuned in, focused, and present in our lives, which ultimately enables us to be more calm, less stressed, make better decisions, and live more joyously.
- **Meditation** is the foundational mental training and building block of living more mindfully. There are many different types of meditation and various techniques dating back thousands of years, but the practices that we will learn are for anyone, regardless of your personal or religious beliefs.
- They all train our attention and focus, and all require practice for us to see their benefits and results.
- Mindfulness-based meditation practice teaches us, through various breathing, focus, and compassion exercises, to have more agency over our thoughts and behavior.
- Another way to think about mindfulness and meditation is that meditation is a formal practice that helps us to develop the skills to live more mindfully.
- We'll be practicing formally in each of these sessions (I'll be guiding you) for just a few minutes each week. You'll also be learning some informal practices to incorporate into your daily routines as you see fit, hopefully making this a habit.
- When we practice, either formally or informally, we are paying attention on purpose, often using a specific "anchor of attention" to help us focus. In the example I gave you earlier, my voice was the "anchor," but over the course of these few weeks we'll practice with others anchors, including the body and bodily sensations that help bring us back to the present moment.
- In both cases, both formal and informal practice, we are taking an intentional PAUSE – the P in Plank. In future weeks we'll talk in more detail about what happens in the brain when we PAUSE, but for now, what we'll practice and begin to understand is that when we PAUSE, we give ourselves an opportunity, even if it is very brief, for space between

the stimulus (what’s happening around us and happening in our heads) and our response.

- When we PAUSE and breathe, focusing on the most fundamental bodily sensation of the breath, we allow ourselves a moment of calm, a moment to settle, a moment to reset, and a moment to think more clearly before we act. All of this benefits our wellbeing.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

GUIDED PRACTICE

(3 minutes)

First, we’re going to do a brief, formal meditation practice called Awareness of Breath Meditation. This is the foundational practice that has been around for thousands of years, using the breath as an anchor of attention. I’ll guide you in this practice. Please remember, this is called practice for a reason. While there are certain techniques and skills that you will learn, there is not “right or wrong” way to practice, it is about noticing your own experience.

AWARENESS of BREATH SCRIPT:

- “First, let’s take a few deep breaths at your own pace, sighing loudly on the exhale if that feels right for you as you begin to settle yourself for practice.
- Your posture should be upright and alert, but supportive and comfortable.
- Allowing the breath returns to its normal rhythm, closing the eyes if that’s comfortable for you, or simply resting the gaze gently towards the floor.
- Begin to draw your attention to the sensation of your breath in your body, identifying where you notice the inhale and exhale.
- This may be at the tip of the nose, inside of the nose, the back of the throat...or perhaps noticing the chest or belly rising and falling with each inhale and exhale...maybe putting a hand gently on chest or belly to feel the rise and fall of the breath, connected to the body.
- Likely, your mind has already wandered away from the breath. That’s OK. That’s what the mind does, even for people who have practiced for many years.
- When you notice the mind has wandered, perhaps even to your workout or other bodily sensations, simply bring your attention back to the sensation of the breath.
- You’ll do this over and over again, gently bringing your attention back to the inhale and exhale.
- Not judging where the mind has wandered, whether it’s to a task (like your to-do list) or an emotion (like being bored or restless) or a sensation (like your foot falling asleep).

Just noticing when the mind has wandered and gently bringing the attention back to the breath.

- We'll sit for a few more moments just practicing returning to the sensation of the breath each time the mind wanders. Just noticing the mind wandering and gently bringing it back.
- When you're ready, you can begin to roll your shoulders, maybe stretch your neck, or reach your arms up, gently bringing movement back into the body, and then when you are ready, opening your eyes.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

DIALOGUE/Q&A

(5 minutes)

1. Can anyone describe how they are feeling upon the completion your first Awareness of Breath Practice?
2. What does it feel like to PAUSE?

EXPLANATION OF AT-HOME PRACTICE:

1. As you go about your week, see if you can incorporate that formal Awareness of Breath practice for even 30 seconds or a minute.
2. Think about a routine that you already have (like coming to this exercise class) that you can tack on a practice to, making it a part of that existing routine.
3. A shorter, more informal practice is called PAUSE 1-2-3. This is intended to help you to stop what you're doing for a moment, and take three long, slow, deep breaths. When we PAUSE and breathe, we give ourselves a reset. Try that right now at your own pace.
4. You have a handout that includes a reminder of these two practices.
5. You've also been given the "Mindful Awareness Scale" that if you like, you can take at home and fill out. It may help you to realize areas in your life that could benefit from more mindful awareness. We'll take it again at the end of our 5 weeks together.
6. As you begin to experiment with mindfulness practice, consider your normal habits and routines. Do you like to set alerts and reminders on your phone or calendar? If so, consider adding a reminder to PAUSE and breathe. Do you like to keep handwritten notes or journal? Then write down the word PAUSE and stop for a moment to breathe or put PAUSE on a post-it note on your bathroom mirror. PAUSE before you drink your first sip of coffee or before you turn the doorknob to enter your home at the end of the workday. Any time can be a moment of practice. Experiment!

FACILITATOR NOTES:

AT HOME PRACTICE - SESSION 1

P - "Pause"

Formal:

As you are able, try a seated, quiet Awareness of Breath Meditation at home by pausing, focusing on the sensation of your breath, and returning to that sensation every time your mind wanders (and it will!). Try 30 seconds to start (you can set a timer if you'd like) and build on that. Even short practice is valuable.

Experiment with this practice at different times of day, before or after different activities, to see what feels right to you (for example, before you get dressed, when you sit down at your desk before beginning to work, lying in bed at night).

Don't be hard on yourself if you forget to practice or you can't sort out the "just right" time in your day. This is all a work in progress and incorporating a new habit can take time. You can share those challenges or barriers in you'd like, and we'll talk about it.

Informal:

As you are able, begin to bring more awareness to the routines and tasks during your day, remembering that the moment you notice you haven't been mindful, you suddenly are!

What does this experience of noticing feel like? If you're the type of person who likes to keep a journal or take notes on your phone, considering keeping track of what you notice. If that feels like a chore, don't do it. Noticing is enough as that noticing is present-moment awareness.

And, when you have a moment of mindful awareness, try to incorporate PAUSE 1-2-3 – stopping and taking three deep, long breaths. What happens in your mind (or body) when you remember to PAUSE? Notice that.

Think about a time in your life that you needed to take a pause/break but didn't? How might the outcome have been different had you paused?

See if you can notice/identify a daily experience or interaction that would benefit from even a brief PAUSE.

If you'd like, fill out the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (questionnaire – link below). There are no right or wrong answers here, but it may give you some insight into areas of your everyday life that you aren't fully engaged in and aware of. We'll talk more about this idea of being on autopilot in coming weeks.

[https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale - Trait \(1\).pdf](https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/The_Mindful_Attention_Awareness_Scale_-_Trait_(1).pdf)

Mind-PLANK: Session 2 - "LETTING GO"

Exercisers will begin to practice "LETTING GO" of thoughts and feelings that carry them away and cause stress and anxiety. By returning to present moment awareness and building the skill of observation, they will begin to practice noticing habits and patterns of behavior that may be helpful to "let go" of.

Key Learnings:

- Building on PAUSE
- Beginning to notice the expectations we have for ourselves and others
- Becoming more comfortable with thoughts, feelings, and sensations without trying to control them
- Beginning to notice habits and patterns of behavior that may cause stress

Unit Essential Questions:

1. Can you begin to identify the experiences that cause you the most stress?
2. How does your reaction to those experiences impact your feelings or choices?
3. What happens to those feelings when you practice PAUSING and LETTING GO

Practices:

- Awareness of breath
- Noting practice (formal and informal)

Notes for the Mindfulness Coach:

You may already have a sense of how talkative or engaged your group is. Feel free to adjust each session to accommodate your participants, allowing for either more instruction, longer practice (by adding longer pauses between the guidance), or more time for dialogue.

Session 2 (continued)

TRANSITION

(5 Minutes)

- As you get settled and transition from your workout take a few deep breaths: breathing in gratitude for the physical exercise you were able to do today and breathing out calm for this time to recover and rest more deeply from your workout. Taking this time to rest and recover more deeply allows us to strengthen the mind alongside the body.
- And as you sit and begin to recover from your workout, take a few moments to just notice any sensations in the body post-workout. Just noticing how the body feels after exercise, connecting to the physical sensation of the body.
- Last week we learned about the P in *Mind-PLANK* – “Pause” – and how when we take a moment to actively engage our awareness, we give ourselves some valuable space between stimulus and response.
- We talked about what mindfulness is, meditation, informal, and formal practice. If you didn’t get a chance to practice, that’s OK. We’ll practice together today.
- Does anyone have any questions?
- If you did experiment with practice on your own, you likely gained a bit more understanding about how a moment of pausing and breathing provides a bit of rest, reset, and perspective.
- Before we move on, would anyone like to share what their experience of last week’s class or personal practice throughout the week was like?
- (Allow for a couple of minutes for dialogue)
- Remember, mindfulness isn’t about clearing our heads, it’s about developing a different relationship with our thoughts and feelings, so that we don’t get carried away by them.
- When we’re carried away, they control us or at least feel like they’re controlling us.
- That brings us to today’s lesson on the L of *Mind-PLANK* - “LETTING GO.”

FACILITATOR NOTES:

DIDACTIC INSTRUCTION

(5 minutes)

- What does “LETTING GO” mean and look like in terms of living more mindfully?
- Well, we can get attached to the idea that things in our life need to be a certain way. We want to be in control. This can be small things, like the right way to fold laundry, or big things, like the expectations we have around how people should act or behave (children, our partner, co-worker, etc.).

- In the gym, this may be expectations about how heavy a weight we can lift, how far we can run, or what our bodies “should” look like.
- When our expectations aren’t met, this creates difficulty, stress, conflict. We suffer.
- This is not to say that some expectations aren’t reasonable. We all want to feel loved, cared for, and respected, for example. We want to feel good and be happy. Letting go does not mean being taken advantage of or ignoring things that are wrong.
- But the reality is we can’t control all of the things, experiences, and people around us.
- We can learn to have more awareness of our reactions and responses in order to increase our self-control, be better able to self-regulate, and become more skillful in how we go about our daily lives.
- Mindfulness practice can help us “LET GO” of the attachments and expectations that cause us distress and suffering by better understanding our patterns of behavior and our own responses to the various situations of daily life.
- But mindful practice shifts the emphasis away from expectations and outcome towards more present-moment awareness, curiosity, and observation. Allowing things to be as they are in the moment, giving those expectations some space, and seeing what happens.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

GUIDED PRACTICE

(5 minutes)

Today, we’re going to build on last week’s Awareness of Breath practice, focusing a bit more on where the mind wanders before we bring our attention back to the breath.

This is called **Noting Practice**, and it allows us to begin to recognize the thoughts, feelings, and sensations that may distract us from the present moment.

We’re going to practice noting if the mind drifts to a thought (for example: I have to make a dentist appointment, the car needs gas), a feeling (I’m angry at my partner, I’m restless sitting here), or a sensation (my nose itches, my back is tight).

Like Awareness of Breath practice, the focus is on the observation itself, not trying to change or control where the mind goes, but simply noticing with curiosity and without judgment where it wanders. Let’s try it.

Session 2 (continued)

Guided Practice

NOTING PRACTICE SCRIPT:

- Begin to settle into a comfortable, seated position, taking a few deep and deliberate breaths as practice begins.
- Remaining alert but comfortable, allowing the breath to return to its normal rhythm. Noticing the sensation of the breath on the inhale and exhale.
- Just becoming aware of the breath. Noticing the breath is always available to you as a way to ground yourself in the present moment.
- As the mind begins to wander - and it will wander, that's OK – take a brief moment to notice where it has gone. No need to linger there, but simply label whether the mind has wandered to a thought, a feeling, or a sensation. Just whatever your first instinct is.
- You can even say to yourself - thought, feeling, sensation - if that's helpful, before gently bringing your awareness back to the breath.
- We're beginning to get comfortable with the wandering of the mind. Not reacting to what we notice when the mind wanders, simply noting where it has gone, letting it go, and returning to the breath.
- If you're finding it difficult to identify where the mind drifts, that's OK, simply practice noting the mind has wandered, let it go, and gently return to awareness of the breath.
- We don't have to change or control where the mind goes, just observe, and gently return to the breath.
- As we come to the end of our practice, take a few more moments to focus on the breath.
- When you're ready, you can begin to roll your shoulders, maybe stretch your neck, or reach your arms up overhead, gently bringing movement back into the body, and then when you are ready, opening your eyes.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

DIALOGUE/Q&A (5 minutes)

1. If you were able to note where the mind wandered, where there any patterns you could identify (some people are more distracted by thoughts, than feelings, for example, or by an itch or ache)?
2. What did it feel like to not react to where you mind was going, but simply continue to pause, sit, and breathe?

3. How might this inform the expectations you may have about the way things “should” be?

EXPLANATION OF AT-HOME PRACTICE:

1. For homework, you’ll be building on PAUSE and LETTING GO by practicing PAUSE, breathing, noting where the mind has gone, and letting it go by gently bringing your attention to back the present moment.
2. Noting Practice can be done formally (like we did today) or more informally, by becoming aware of when and where the mind wanders during your everyday tasks and experiences (for example, when you lose your place while reading something).
3. We’ll talk more next week about what happens when we react instead of responding to what we notice.
4. For right now, just noticing, and practicing LETTING GO is enough.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

AT HOME PRACTICE - SESSION 2

L - "Letting Go"

Formal:

As you are able, try a seated, quiet Noting Practice (30 seconds - 2 minutes at home) by first focusing on the sensation of the breath, then noticing where your mind wanders. Setting a timer is helpful.

Before gently returning to the breath, see if you can identify if the mind has wandered to a thought, a feeling, or sensation.

Remember, you're developing your ability to be curious and observant about your own experiences without trying to change or control them.

Informal:

As you go about your day, can you bring more awareness and attention to what distracts you?

For example, is your growling stomach making it hard to focus on work? Are you thinking about an argument you had earlier in the day while making dinner? This is informal noting practice. Ultimately, the information we receive allows us to make better decisions about what we do next.

Can you become more aware of any habits or patterns in your life related to the expectations you have for yourself and others? How do those expectations make you feel when they distract you?

What happens when you take a moment to PAUSE, BREATHE, and acknowledge those thoughts, feelings, and emotions, but then LET GO – even just for a moment?

PARTICIPANT NOTES:

Mind-PLANK: Session 3 - "AWARENESS"

Building on noticing patterns of behavior by observing the mind, exercisers will learn more about how the brain works, and how bringing awareness to everyday experiences can improve self-regulation.

Key Learnings:

- Skillful responsiveness vs. unskillful reactivity
- What's happening in the brain? – amygdala versus pre-frontal cortex
- Mindful awareness through the most basic daily activity – eating - as a way to ground oneself in the present moment

Unit Essential Questions:

1. What do you do every day on autopilot?
2. What happens when you bring more awareness to experiences or situations?
3. Can you think of an example in your life that would be improved by responsiveness instead of reactivity?

Practices:

- Mindful Eating
- STOP (Stop, Take a Breath, Observe, Proceed)

Notes for the Mindfulness Coach:

Be prepared to bring some options to this session for the Mindful Eating practice. Raisins will suffice, or some alternate, small, snack food, keeping in mind potential allergens.

Session 3 (continued)

TRANSITION

(4 Minutes)

- As you get settled and transition from your workout, take a few deep breaths: breathing in gratitude for the physical exercise you were able to do today and breathing out calm for this time to recover more deeply as we take time to learn to practice strengthening the mind alongside the body.
- And as you sit and begin to recover from your workout, take a few moments to just notice any sensations in the body post-workout. Just noticing how the body feels after exercise, connecting to the physical sensation of the body.
- Last week we talked about noting the thoughts, feelings, and sensations that arise during our life experiences and practiced “LETTING GO” of the control those expectations have over us.
- Would anyone like to share what it was like to practice intentionally noting what happened when the mind wandered, and you returned to the breath?
- Where you able to note any patterns?
- (Allow time for brief dialogue)
- Today, we’re going to talk more about how AWARENESS (the “A” of *Mind-PLANK*), allows us to have more agency over how we respond to what we notice instead of reacting impulsively.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

DIDACTIC INSTRUCTION

(6 minutes)

- It’s important to understand a little bit about how the brain works, as impulsive behaviors and knee-jerk reactions are rooted in the least evolved part of our brain – the amygdala.
- The amygdala, located at the base of the brain is part of the sympathetic nervous system, and responsible for what was once referred to as our “Fight or Flight,” instinct, but now includes “Fight, Flight, or Freeze.”
- In other words, when we feel threatened in some way, this area of the brain is activated, and we either “fight” (attack, act out, lash out), “flight” (run away) or “freeze” (disengage, avoid) without employing any critical thinking to the situation.
- This is an impulsive and instinctual reaction to stress, but it’s not very skillful.

- When we pay attention, we often feel this stress in our bodies (racing heart, sweaty palms, upset stomach). Our bodies give us important feedback about how we are impacted by our environment, but in the “heat of the moment” this information often isn’t available to us.
- Another part of our brain – the pre-frontal cortex (right behind our forehead) – is responsible for higher level, critical thinking, bringing context to situations, and allowing us to have perspective. It allows us to make decisions and respond more skillfully and less erratically to situations.
- Studies have shown that in the brains of experienced meditators, the amygdala is actually smaller, and the pre-frontal cortex is actually larger than non-meditators, suggesting that mindfulness practice helps to improve our ability to PAUSE and become AWARE before reacting, quieting the impulsive part of our brain.
- We can train our brains to make more skillful, less impulsive decisions. This requires practice through AWARENESS.
- Another way of understanding this is that amygdala is our autopilot – it is more automatic, instead of thoughtful.
- But when we practice being intentionally AWARE, when we pause and breathe, we have an opportunity to disengage that autopilot, quieting the pre-historic part of our brain, and engaging with the more evolved part of our brain, allowing us to better regulate and moderate whatever is present.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

GUIDED PRACTICE

(5 minutes)

We’re going to practice this today with something we do all the time, often quite automatically and without awareness – eating.

This is a particularly relevant activity within our space here at the gym, given that routine exercise combined with healthy eating helps us to feel good.

To be clear, this Mindful Eating practice is not a lesson in nutrition, it is not about dieting, or limiting your food intake, and it is not about feeling badly about eating the things you enjoy.

Quite the opposite, this exercise is about intentionally slowing down and really experiencing, with your full awareness, what it is like to eat, to nourish your body.

Lesson 3 (continued)

Guided Practice Explanation

And just like with our emotions, when we take a moment to pause and engage more fully in the present moment, this allows us to be more aware. It allows us to disengage the autopilot.

I'm going to hand out (raisins or alternate small, snack such as M&M's, being conscious to ask about any allergies first) and I want you to just hold it in your hand and wait for my instructions.

MINDFUL EATING SCRIPT:

- OK, we're going to experience eating very deliberately, using all of our senses. This may feel strange, but remember, this is another way to practice present-moment awareness.
- First, I want you to look at the (raisin) really closely. Take the time to turn it over in the palm of your hand, noticing what the surface looks like, its texture and color.
- Begin to notice what the (raisin) feels like on the palm of your hand and between your fingers. Turn it around, maybe close your eyes, and feel its shape more intensely.
- Bring it up to your nose and smell it. Have you ever done that before?
- How about listening to it? Does it have a sound? This may seem silly, but we're exploring this everyday experience of eating in a different way, using all of our senses deliberately.
- Now, when you put it in your mouth, can you do so slowly, turning it over on your tongue, noticing where you taste it, bringing awareness to the sensation of chewing, and ultimately, of slowly.
- Can you bring awareness to the (raisin) entering your throat and even your stomach?
- When you're finished, you can feel free to try again, maybe playing around with going even slower, or perhaps more quickly, like or at whatever pace you would normally eat.
- Once everyone has eaten at least one (raisin) we'll discuss the experience.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

DIALOGUE/Q&A (5 minutes)

1. Did you notice anything other than the eating itself? Perhaps an emotion or feeling associated with being so deliberate?
2. What does it feel like to bring this awareness to taking just one bite?

Lesson 3 (continued)
DIALOGUE/Q&A

EXPLANATION OF AT-HOME PRACTICE:

1. You can continue to experiment with Mindful Eating by choosing one meal a day, or even one bite a day, to eat more mindfully.
2. A helpful way to remember is the acronym STOP– S is for Stop what you’re doing; T is for take a breath; O is for observe what’s happening (in other words, bring awareness to the experience); and P is for proceed. This short practice can be applied to eating, or any task or situation that tends to happen on autopilot. It’s another way to help us PAUSE and become more AWARE.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

AT HOME PRACTICE - SESSION 3

A - "Awareness"

Formal:

Try the Mindful Eating Practice for at least one meal (or even one bite at one meal!) this week, eating deliberately, slowly, in silence and without doing anything else. This might be sitting with your morning coffee and just enjoying the warmth of the cup in your hands and its smell and taste for a few moments without being on your phone or watching TV. Bring all of your bodily senses and sensations to the experience of eating or drinking.

Informal:

Practice STOP (Stop, Take a breath, Observe, Proceed) if you notice you are on autopilot.

Identify one task/activity that you often do on autopilot (without thinking). Can you bring more awareness to that task? What happens when you do?

Practice bringing more awareness to personal interactions, and notice what happens if you intentionally pause and then respond instead of reacting.

It's difficult to disengage the autopilot, but even noticing situations where we tend to have knee-jerk reactions is a helpful first step to building present-moment awareness.

PARTICIPANT NOTES:

Mind-PLANK: Session 4 - "NON-JUDGMENT"

As exercisers continue to develop awareness of their experiences, they will practice acceptance and non-judgment, using the sensations of the body to ground oneself in the present moment.

Key Learnings:

- The mind-body connection inherent in mindfulness practice
- Paying attention to the body as a way to ground oneself in present-moment awareness
- Practicing non-judgment when noticing the feedback, the body gives us

Unit Essential Questions:

1. What happens when you bring attention to the sensations of body deliberately and without judgment?
2. Can you let go of any expectations of performance related to the body and simply tune in to the experience of being present and alive?
3. Does awareness of the body give you feedback on how you're feeling? Explain.

Practices:

- Body Scan (full) or CALM (modified body scan of chest, arms, legs, and mind)
- Five-Finger Breathing and Stand & Shift

Notes for the Mindfulness Coach:

Based on the makeup of your class, determine if you'd like to guide a more formal body scan in a prone position (on mats, if they are available) or a modified "CALM" practice in either a prone or seated position.

Session 4 (continued)

TRANSITION

(1-2 Minutes)

- As you get settled and transition from your workout take a few deep breaths: breathing in gratitude for the physical exercise you were able to do today and breathing out calm for this time to recover more deeply as we take time to strengthen the mind alongside the body.
- And as you sit and begin to recover from your workout, take a few moments to just notice any sensations in the body post-workout. Just noticing how the body feels after exercise, connecting to the physical sensation of the body.
- Last week, we talked about the areas of our brain responsible for reactivity and responsiveness, the amygdala and pre-frontal cortex.
- We practiced bringing awareness to everyday activities in order to disengage our automatic responses (autopilot).
- Would anyone like to share their experience with practice this week? Were you able to pay attention on purpose to your everyday experiences? Did you notice when you were on autopilot?
- (Allow time for brief dialogue)
- This week, we're going to build on that AWARENESS with the next step in Mind-PLANK – "N" for NON-JUDGMENT.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

DIDACTIC INSTRUCTION

(8 minutes)

- Non-judgment is similar to what we discussed last week about bringing heightened awareness to our experiences in order to respond skillfully.
- Non-judgment is about practicing acceptance of your experience, whatever it is, instead of being reactive to it, or like we discussed in Week 2, LETTING GO of some control and expectations.
- This can happen on a personal level, in how we experience the feedback our body gives us, or how we feel about ourselves either physically or mentally, or more broadly, when we judge others.
- The environment of a gym is sometimes a place of judgment. We may be critical of our own bodies, about our stamina or strength, or fixate on being a certain size. We may compare ourselves to others.

- This judgment doesn't serve us well. It's not healthy. Mindfulness can help us notice those patterns of judgment.
- All of that judgmental thinking is detrimental to our health and wellbeing and can increase our stress and anxiety.
- When we focus our attention on the judgments themselves, instead of what is really happening in any given moment, we are missing out on fully being present with the experience of being alive.
- Mindfulness practice can help us gain perspective and acceptance of those experiences. And when we are less judgmental, we are able to bring clarity to our experiences.
- Non-judgment doesn't mean that we become unresponsive or allow others to take advantage of us. It doesn't mean that can't form opinions about what we value or how we might want to change or improve ourselves, but it does encourage us to find balance by not getting carried away by judgments.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

GUIDED PRACTICE

(5 minutes)

The sensations of the body as a whole can be another way to practice being both more aware, more accepting, and less judgmental.

Every time we notice a physical sensation: body temperature, heartbeat, sweat, tension, sounds (like your stomach rumbling) we are paying attention, on purpose, to the present moment, just noticing what is happening without judgment.

This mind-body connection is incredibly important, as it gives us feedback on how we're feeling. And this feedback is particularly useful as human beings and as exercisers, as injury or pain is sometimes part of our life experience and a part of exercising as well.

The Body Scan Practice allows us to systematically take stock of how our bodies are feeling – it is a check-in, a pause, and a reset. A shorter version of the full Body Scan is CALM (Chest, Arms, Legs, Mind) and is included in the At-Home Practice this week.

And, when we make the connection between mind and body during mindfulness practice, we activate the parasympathetic nervous system, allowing the body to calm as we breathe and bring mindful attention to the body.

We're going to do a body scan today. Many people enjoy this practice at night before bed to allow the body to calm. It may make you sleepy. That's OK.

Lesson 4 (continued)

BODY SCAN PRACTICE SCRIPT:

- As you are comfortable, rest in a prone position and begin to notice the sensation and weight of your body on the ground or mat. If it's more comfortable for you to modify by bending your knees to support your back, that's fine. This is your practice.
- Notice the inhale and exhale of your breath as we have practiced, either in your nose, or by putting a hand on the chest or belly.
- Draw the attention to the left foot, perhaps noticing the toes within your socks and sneakers, or where the sock ends on your calf and shin.
- Allow your attention to travel up to your knee and then your quads and hamstrings.
- We're just noticing the body, noticing if anything changes in our sensation of the body as we bring attention there.
- Shift the attention to the right foot and toes, calf and shin, knee, quads, hamstrings.
- Notice the hips and glutes, moving up towards the abdomen and then chest, perhaps stopping for a moment to notice the breath.
- Allow your attention to travel to your left hand, noticing the fingers and wrist, moving up to the forearm and elbow, to the biceps and triceps and then shoulder.
- Just taking stock of the body. Noticing how it feels. Allowing it to settle.
- Shift your attention to the right hand, noticing the fingers and wrist, moving up to the forearm and elbow, to the biceps and triceps and then shoulder.
- Notice the collarbone and neck, the jaw and mouth, cheekbones, nose, eyes in their sockets, ears, forehead.
- Notice the top of the head, and the back of the head resting on the mat.
- Breathe deeply into the body. Just noticing. Just bringing awareness to the body and breath.
- As we come to the end of our practice, begin to move your body, perhaps rolling the ankles or wrists, stretching the arms above the head, and opening the eyes when you are ready.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

DIALOGUE/Q&A

(5 minutes)

- What happens when you bring mindful attention to the body?
- If you became aware of any areas of tension or feelings of discomfort, what happened when you noticed those areas?

Lesson 4 (continued)

EXPLANATION OF AT-HOME PRACTICE:

For homework you'll be practicing the **Body Scan** by checking in, slowly and systematically with the various parts of the body. This is best done lying down. Alternately, you can practice a shorter, modified version of the Body Scan called **CALM** by checking in more broadly with the Chest, Arms, Legs, and Mind, simply becoming aware of what's happening in the body and mind. This could be done in a seated position at a desk chair, during your commute (keep the eyes open), or at the kitchen table.

I want to teach you two other practices that engage the body and can be done more informally. We'll do them here, but I encourage you to practice these at home any time you PAUSE and reset. When we check in with the body and take in non-judgmental feedback, we have an opportunity to PAUSE and engage with the present moment.

The first is **5-Finger Breathing**: Open one hand and use your other hand to trace your fingers, breathing in as you trace upwards, and exhaling as you trace downwards. Do this slowly and methodically, connecting the breath and the tactile sensation of the body.

Another is **Stand & Shift**. Let's all stand for a moment, first grounding ourselves on both feet. Then, gently rise and lower the heel of one foot, then the other. Then gently rise and lower the toes of each foot. Finally, let's gently and slowly shift our weight from one foot to the other, noticing how the body adjusts and responds to this movement.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

AT HOME PRACTICE - SESSION 4

N - "Non-Judgement"

Formal:

Try the Body Scan (long) practice at different times of day. Is there a time that feels most restorative? Sometimes a body scan at bedtime can help with relaxation and sleep.

You can modify the Body Scan with the CALM practice, focusing more broadly on the **Chest, Arms, Legs and Mind** as a brief, non-judgmental check-in on how you're feeling. This can easily be done in a seated position.

Informal:

Try the **5-Finger Breathing** technique. Open one hand and use your other hand to trace your fingers, breathing in as you trace upwards, and exhaling as you trace downwards.

Try the **Stand & Shift** practice as a way to take a pause and connect the mind and body to the present moment. Is there a time of day or a specific situation where this feels useful or helpful (maybe waiting in a line or during a challenging conversation)?

Can you bring more awareness and non-judgment to your experience with exercise this week? This might mean simply noticing how a muscle group feels during a particular exercise from one day to the next. Can you bring more awareness to how you feel before you exercise and after?

Try becoming more aware of how and when the body moves or transitions. For example, try to notice every time you go from sitting to standing or standing to sitting. Every time you DO notice this transition; this is a moment of mindful, present-moment awareness.

You may find it's difficult to remember to notice when we engage our body in everyday movement. We often take it for granted and might go the whole day without ever noticing. That's OK. Try again at different times during the week. Remember, this is practice.

PARTICIPANT NOTES:

Mind-PLANK: Session 5 - "KINDNESS & COMPASSION"

Exercisers will expand their practice to incorporate the concept of kindness and compassion towards both them and others.

Key Learnings:

- Understanding the importance of kindness and compassion as part of mindfulness practice
- When we intentionally practice cultivating kindness and compassion to others in formal practice, we are better able to act with kindness and compassion in our everyday lives
- We are all interconnected

Unit Essential Questions:

1. Can you practice treating yourself with more kindness and tenderness?
2. How does that extend to other relationships in your life?

Practices:

- Metta (Loving Kindness)
- WAIT – "Why am I Talking?"

Notes for the Mindfulness Coach:

Included at the end of this final session is a brief assessment tool. Encourage your participants to fill it out at the end of this session to provide feedback on the 5-week course.

Lesson 5 (continued)

TRANSITION

(1-2 Minutes)

- As you get settled and transition from your workout take a few deep breaths: breathing in gratitude for the physical exercise you were able to do today and breathing out calm for this time to recover more deeply, taking this time to learn how to strengthen your mind alongside your body.
- And as you sit and begin to recover from your workout, take a few moments to just notice any sensations in the body post-workout. Just noticing how the body feels after exercise, connecting to the physical sensation of the body.
- Last week, we practiced not judging our experiences, but simply honing our awareness of what is happening in the present moment. When we focus on the body, we can ground ourselves in the sensations of the present moment.
- This also gives us valuable feedback to what's going on in the mind.
- Over the course of these past four weeks, you've learned and experienced what happens when we intentionally PAUSE and LET GO (even just a little bit) to our tension, our expectations, allowing time to simply observe and rest.
- We have practiced bringing AWARENESS to those experiences, feelings, and sessions with NON-JUDGMENT and acceptance.
- These are all valuable skills and tools that help us better regulate difficulty and challenge and allow us to have more agency over our decision-making.
- This is an ongoing, lifelong practice. These tools and techniques only "work" if you use and practice them, experiencing them for yourself, over and over again in each new moment, at any time, all the time.
- When we are aware, we live our lives more fully.
- But all of this awareness and acceptance is rooted in gentleness and non-judgment towards ourselves first, which brings us to our final week of *Mind-PLANK* – "K" for KINDNESS and compassion.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

DIDACTIC INSTRUCTION

(8 minutes)

- The roots of mindfulness practice are based on the belief that everyone is capable of kindness and compassion, and by extension, every human being wants the same thing: to be loved, cared for, and treated humanely.

- We don't have to look too far to find examples every day of what happens when people are not kind and compassionate to one another with both words and actions.
- But anger, sadness, and frustration can make it difficult to be kind and compassionate to ourselves and others, especially towards people with whom we disagree or to those who have hurt us. Those feelings are understandable.
- That's why a big component of mindfulness is the practice of kindness and compassion, called Metta, Loving-Kindness or Boundless Friendship Practice.
- When we practice being kinder and more compassionate in formal practice, we build the skills to be kind and compassionate out in the world.
- Practically speaking, a growing number of studies suggest that intentionally practicing kindness and compassion improves our own self-esteem, decreases our implicit bias, and builds healthier, happier relationships.
- Metta practice can be difficult, but that is why we practice, to build our resilience to the challenges and suffering that others may cause, and to build our own capacity for kindness and compassion.
- The more we think and act with kindness and compassion, the more likely we are to feel good about the relationships we have and the decisions we make in our everyday lives.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

GUIDED PRACTICE

(5 minutes)

This practice may feel strange at first. It may bring up feelings of hopefulness and joy, but for others, there may be discomfort or awkwardness, even sadness. That's OK.

Many of us do not think about kindness and compassion as part of their daily routine, but when we intentionally focus on these qualities, we become better able to grow them.

METTA (Loving Kindness) PRACTICE:

- Take a moment to find a comfortable seated position, alert and upright, but relaxed.
- Take a few deep breaths at your own pace and close your eyes if that feels comfortable to you.
- We're going to practice cultivating kindness for ourselves and for those around us
- Let's begin by first bringing to mind a person (or even pet), living or passed, whom you care deeply about.
- Notice the feelings of warmth and caring that arise when thinking of this person.
- Repeat these phrases to yourself: May you be happy, May you be healthy, May you live with joy and ease.

- Next, bring to mind someone you may encounter every day, but may not have a relationship with – a clerk at the grocery store, someone you see getting coffee every morning, for example.
- If no one comes to mind immediately, that's OK. Just return to the first person who came to mind.
- When bringing to mind this person, repeat these phrases to yourself: May you be happy, May you be healthy, May you live with joy and ease.
- Next, bring to mind someone who may be difficult, this can be someone you know or a stranger. It doesn't matter, we are just practicing cultivating kindness.
- May you be happy, May you be healthy, May you live with joy and ease.
- Finally, let's practice turning that loving-kindness towards ourselves. It's not something we often practice doing, but it's important to treat ourselves with kindness and care.
- May I be happy, May I be healthy, May I live with joy and ease.
- Sit for a moment in stillness, allowing the feelings of kindness to wash over you.
- When you are ready, you can begin to reconnect with your body, stretching and then opening your eyes when you are ready.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

Lesson 5 (continued)

DIALOGUE/Q&A

(5 minutes)

1. What does it feel like to practice kindness?
2. How might this practice benefit you in areas of your life?
3. Over the past weeks you've been exposed to some mindfulness basics and explored various practices. Is there a particular practice, technique, or instruction that stands out to you?
4. How will you continue to practice and make mindfulness a part of your routine?

EXPLANATION OF AT-HOME PRACTICE:

I encourage you to continue practicing Metta formally, but we can practice kindness more informally in our interpersonal relationships with a practice called WAIT (Why Am I Talking?).

Often, when we're engaged in conversation with others, we neglect to bring our mindful attention and PAUSE to that experience. We may talk over others or be thinking about the next thing we want to say instead of truly listening to the other person.

We can bring more kindness and compassion to our interactions with others by pausing and waiting before we speak and respond, using the acronym **WAIT** (stopping and considering what we're saying). I encourage you to notice situations that benefit from talking some time to respond. This is mindfulness practice in everyday life.

Closing Remarks:

Thank you for this time together to practice. Remember, just like physical exercise, when we stop working out, moving and using our bodies, we don't feel as strong and energetic. Ongoing fitness requires making it part of our routine and habit.

The same is true for mindfulness. The more we practice, the more we strengthen and condition that mental muscle. This 5-week course is the very first step.

You've already made a commitment to your physical health. I hope you have begun to see the value and positive impact focusing on your mental health brings. But this too will take practice and dedication. I encourage you to keep practicing, and use the additional resources provided to grow and build your own mindful practice.

I'm going to hand out an Assessment form. I would appreciate your feedback on this course. Included in your At-Home Practice is the same Mindful Awareness Scale you took at the beginning of this course. If you'd like, fill it out and see if anything has changed over the course of this class.

May you continue to make mindfulness part of your fitness regimen, and more importantly, your life, to support your health and wellbeing.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

AT HOME PRACTICE - SESSION 5
K - "Kindness"

Formal:

Metta Practice can take time to understand. Don't force it, but experiment with this practice at your own pace. Below are the phrases we used in class, but you can modify them as you see fit.

May you be happy.

May you be healthy.

May you live with joy and ease.

Informal:

In conversations with others, we often aren't fully engaged, focusing our attention on when it's our turn to speak and what we're going to say next, instead of truly listening to the other person. Mindfully listening and speaking are rooted in kindness.

We can remind ourselves to slow down, listen, and pause before speaking by practicing WAIT (Why Am I Talking?). Remembering to WAIT allows for some space between the speaker and your response, allowing for true listening, and time to determine what is the next best response (which after waiting, might be nothing at all).

Can you bring metta practice into your daily experiences and interactions? In how you treat yourself and others?

In Week 1 you were given the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale. Feel free to take it again and see if there's anything that may have changed from your first class. Don't be discouraged if it hasn't. Building mindful attention takes practice, just like strengthening our physical bodies. Keep practicing.

[https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale - Trait \(1\).pdf](https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/The_Mindful_Attention_Awareness_Scale_-_Trait_(1).pdf)

Additional Resources:

There are a tremendous number of resources available, both free and for purchase, but here are just a few. I encourage you to explore and experiment with various texts, apps, and other online resources, depending on your own interests. What is most important is to keep practicing.

In no particular order, here are some of my favorites:

Books:

- Jon Kabat-Zinn – *Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming the Present Moment and Your Life*
- Dan Harris – *10% Happier*
- George Mumford – *The Mindful Athlete: Secrets to Peak Performance*
- Jon Kabat-Zinn – *Wherever You Go, There You Are*
- Thich Nhat Hahn – *The Miracle of Mindfulness*
- Oren Jay Sofer – *Say What You Mean, Mean What You Say*
- Mary Oliver – *Devotions*
- Kristen Neff – *Self Compassion: Stop Beating Yourself Up and Leave Insecurity Behind*
- Dan Siegel – *Aware: The Science and Practice of Presence*
- Rick Hanson – *Resilient: How to Grow an Unshakable Core of Calm, Strength, and Happiness*
- Gail Andersen Stark – *Creating a Life of Integrity: In Conversation with Joseph Goldstein*
- Corey Muskara – *Stop Missing Your Life*
- Tara Brach: *True Refuge*
- Jud Brewer – *Unwinding Anxiety*
- Sharon Salzberg – *Real Change*

Please note that virtually all of these authors have their own websites and YouTube channels, many which offer coursework and opportunities for practice. I encourage you to discover the teacher or guide that fits with your ongoing practice.

Apps:

- Headspace
- Calm
- Mindfulness.com
- Unwinding Anxiety
- Eat Right Now
- Insight Timer

Assessment Tool

Circle what applies for each question:

I can see that what I've learned, experienced, or have begun to learn is making a difference to how I relate to myself and others, and how I make choices.

Never, sometimes, mostly, always

I PAUSE when I need to reset or take a break.

Never, sometimes, mostly, always

I can bring my attention back to my task at hand in my work when I notice that I'm distracted.

Never, sometimes, mostly, always

I am aware when I'm judging myself or others more frequently, and I accept this as learned awareness.

Never, sometimes, mostly, always

I can pay attention to the sensations of the body to ground myself in the present moment.

Never, sometimes, mostly, always

I can recognize when I am on autopilot.

Never, sometimes, mostly, always

I am making time for practice during my daily life.

Never, sometimes, mostly, always

Which Lesson has been the most impactful in your learning about mindfulness?

P – Pause

L – Letting Go

A – Awareness

N – Non-Judgment

K – Kindness & Compassion

Circle all that apply

None

Which practice have you been able to use in daily life? Circle all that apply

Awareness of Breath

PAUSE 1-2-3

STOP (Stop, Take a breath, Observe, Proceed)

Noting

Mindful Eating

Body Scan

Stand & Shift

Five-Finger Breathing

CALM

Metta (Loving-Kindness)

WAIT (Why Am I Talking?)

Additional Comments? (use the space below)