

UC Medical Center

SAFETY SPOTLIGHT

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Mindfulness to Avoid Injury

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POSTER OF THE MONTH

MONTHLY UC Medical Center SAFETY SPOTLIGHT

Mindfulness

Our bodies and our minds are not always aligned. In fact, a recent Harvard study published in Science demonstrates that our minds wander away from our task at hand approximately 47% of the time.

So, even though your body is here, your mind may be anywhere... drifting to the past (maybe a conversation you had earlier today), or to the future (perhaps you are thinking about your pressing-to-do list).

Mindfulness Exercise

There are many ways that we can bring our attention to the present moment. One of the gateways is through our senses. If you like, you can try it right now, wherever you happen to be...

How was that to use your senses to bring yourself more fully into this moment?

There are various reactions to taking part in mindfulness exercises. Perhaps you found it challenging to keep your mind from wandering. Maybe, instead, it was relaxing. Some people think they should achieve a particular state, and feel concerned when they do not.

Whatever your experience, Kabat-Zinn (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction founder) explains, "Mindfulness is not about getting anywhere else - it's about being where you are and knowing it."

UC MEDICAL CENTER SAFETY SPOTLIGHT

Mindfulness to Avoid Injury

By Jessica Drew de Paz, PsyD

Inattention/Distraction

There are so many distractions occurring in our daily lives. Not only do our cell phones and other gadgets pull our attention, our busy minds often take our focus away from the task at hand. In fact, inattention/distraction is one of the most common associated root causes of employee injuries.

Is inattention/distraction a primary safety hazard at your site?

If so, how are you addressing it? Traditional safety training programs teach critical, technical safety skills. However, the issue of attention is rarely addressed. When the subject is broached, instructors may encourage participants to “pay attention” while facing a particular hazard. But telling people to pay attention and teaching them to do so are entirely different.

Mindfulness is Attention Training

Mindfulness training teaches participants how to pay attention and has been practiced for thousands of years around the world. In 1979, Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn developed Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) to alleviate the stress, pain and suffering of medical patients.

Eventually the program was made available to the public at large, and the interest was so great that it led to the creation of the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society at the University of Massachusetts.

The Mindful Revolution

Studies demonstrate benefits for a range of conditions, including chronic pain, type 2 diabetes, cancer, HIV, substance abuse as well as anxiety and depression. Even healthy individuals demonstrate improvements in such areas as immune functioning, attention and well-being.

Reduced stress is perhaps the most widely reported benefit. Visit the Safety Spotlight poster this month for tips on how to refocus, reboot and relax the brain.

Studies are also focused on the way in which mindfulness impacts performance. UC Santa Barbara students who were randomly assigned to a 2-week mindfulness training (compared to a nutrition class) significantly improved both GRE reading-comprehension scores and working memory capacity, while simultaneously reducing occurrence of distracting thoughts. Companies such as Google, Procter & Gamble, and General Mills are sold on the health and performance benefits afforded by mindfulness. Google offers a variety of free programs to its employees, and has developed a leadership institute entitled “Search Inside Yourself.”

As evidence accumulates and mindfulness proliferates in the fields of medicine, psychology, education, business, law, the military, and athletics, I invite you to contemplate the following...

Given that:

- Practicing mindfulness has significant health and performance benefits,
- Mindfulness is attention training, and
- Inattention/distraction is a primary cause of injuries...

Isn't it time that we apply mindfulness to the field of safety?



Is your mind full, or are you mindful? So many of us operate with our minds so full that we miss the very moment that is right in front of us. The studies clearly demonstrate that learning to experience life like the person on the right will improve our health. We believe that being mindful will also improve our safety.

[UC Irvine's Environmental Health & Safety](#) department, in collaboration with the [Susan Samueli Center for Integrative Medicine](#), is contributing to the research by investigating whether practicing mindfulness improves employee attention and reduces workplace injuries. We have piloted our “Mindful Health & Safety Program” (an adaptation of MBSR) with nurses at UC Irvine Medical Center, as well as UC Irvine EH&S staff and Facilities Management leadership.

Below are a few participant comments:

“Very applicable to every day work and personal life.”

“The exercises (mental and physical) help focus the mind.”

“I am better at challenging myself to let go of what I can't control in the work place.”

“There are a lot of things going on, lots of input, lots of stressors. Now, you think, I really should be paying attention to the road, and the red light, and the person walking.”

“I work in the ICU, and I have a lot of stressful situations. It helps me to do the breathing and calm down. And with the hand washing meditation, it helps me to take a few breaths and calm down, and reprioritize, and keep calm in upsetting situations. My adrenaline doesn’t get as high as it has in the past, so I can think ‘What’s the next move?’”

“My experience was excellent – it was worth it. It makes me slow things down and take time for myself. If I don’t, I can’t be there to take care of others. I wish everyone could have this chance. It totally makes a difference. I even take a few deep breaths before I administer medication to a patient. I believe this will cut down on medical errors.”

“This helps make you more productive, and it also helps us in our personal lives, to enjoy some of those good moments, be healthier, be good to yourself. It offers everybody something.”

In addition to conducting research, the UC Mindful Health & Safety Center of Excellence is working to customize Mindful Health & Safety programs to meet to needs of various audiences across the UC system. To access a variety of resources on cultivating healthier, safer workplaces, please visit our website at <http://sites.uci.edu/mindfulhs/>.

We invite you to contact us, and look forward to collaborating with you to integrate mindfulness into your workplace.



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FEEDBACK PLEASE

Send an email to safetyspotlight@ucdavis.edu to submit your comments on the February issue or to suggest content ideas for future issues. We look forward to hearing from you!

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