

Living Beyond Cancer A-Z Symposium

UT Health San Antonio

MD Anderson Cancer Center

Mindfulness/Spirituality

Living a Meaningful Life

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In this moment...



Outline

- Showing Up
- The Stacking Effect
- Reducing suffering
- Benefits of mindfulness
- Exercises for coping well
- Resources & wrap-up



The Stacking Effect

Pain vs. suffering

Suffering

(Reactive habitual thoughts, feelings, actions)

Pain

(Initial unpleasant experience)

Lash out at family...

Everything has been going wrong for me, just one more thing!

This is how I start my day, perfect! It really hurts

Anger/Frustration

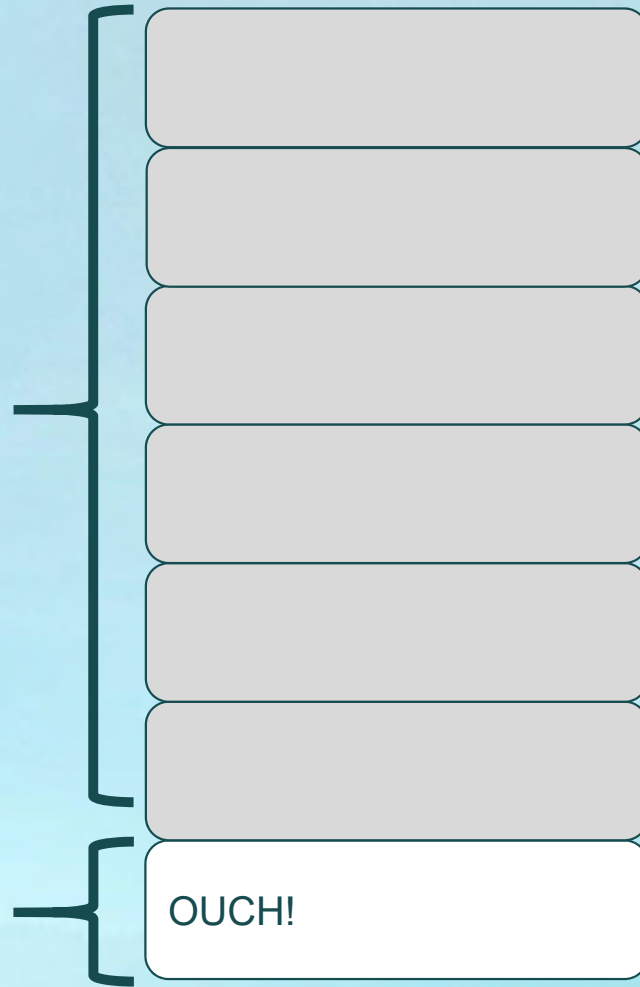
Why is this table even here?? Who did this

OMG I think I broke my toe!

OUCH!

Suffering

(Reactive habitual thoughts & feelings & actions)



Pain

(Initial unpleasant experience)



Pause

We can't stop *pain* from showing up in our lives...

But we can reduce our *suffering*

What if instead of **reacting** to the pain with usual unhelpful habits (suffering)...
we could **accept** the pain that shows up...
And thoughtfully **respond**?

Mindfulness can help you stop REACTING to pain and difficult experiences, and get better at RESPONDING to them.

Ineffective
coping

Effective
coping

An alternative...?

Pain
(Initial unpleasant experience)



Coping Skill...and
re-engage in your life



Less suffering

Coping well & living meaningfully

Reducing harm

Suffering = Pain + Non-acceptance

We cannot get rid of the “pain” of cancer, but how can we cope well and live meaningfully in the midst of it?

Mindfulness...

Paying attention
In a particular way;
On purpose,
in the present moment,
and
nonjudgmentally.
(Jon Kabat-Zinn, 2006)

What: Attentional Control + Awareness
How: Nonjudgmentally

Spirituality...

- Spirituality may be defined by:
 - Religious well-being → Achieving harmony with God)
 - Existential well-being → Finding meaning and purpose in one's life)

Paloutzian RF, Ellison CW. Loneliness, spiritual well-being and the quality of life. *Loneliness: A sourcebook of current theory, research and therapy.* 1982:224-37.



Benefits of mindfulness

Why is mindfulness helpful?

Mindfulness for patients with cancer can help:

Decrease

- Depression & anxiety
- Stress
- Fear of recurrence
- Fatigue
- Pain
- Inflammatory signaling

Increase

- Quality of life
- Peace
- Meaning
- Positive affect (mood)





Exercises for effective coping

How can I practice mindfulness?

Body

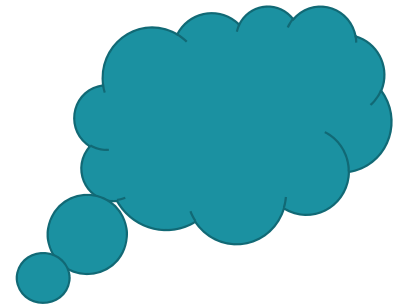
- For when you have pain, fatigue, side effects, physical discomfort, practice:
- **Refocusing your attention**
 - Attention on the breath
 - Brief body scan
- **Getting out of your head**
 - 5-4-3-2-1*
 - Mindful eating

We usually try to feel better by decreasing the intensity of painful experiences; in mindfulness practice, we work instead to increase our capacity to bear them.

- Ronald Siegel, PsyD (2010)

Mind

- For dealing with tough emotions, thoughts, habits/behaviors, practice:
 - **Taking a break**
 - *Worries in a box
 - Scheduling a time to worry
 - **Letting go of difficult thoughts/emotions**
 - Leaves on a stream
 - Urge surfing



Life

- To help your social connections and interpersonal challenges, practice:
 - **Being fully present with others**
 - Continuous eye contact
 - *Dyad appearance exercise
 - **Fully participating in your life**
 - Singing really loud/Car Dancing
 - Mindful walking



A Contemplative Practice

Build skills every day

Loving Kindness Meditation (LKM)

*May I be filled with lovingkindness.
May I be safe from inner and outer dangers.
May I be well in body and mind.
May I be at ease and happy*

*May you be filled with lovingkindness.
May you be safe from inner and outer dangers.
May you be well in body and mind.
May you be at ease and happy.*

*May all beings be filled with lovingkindness.
May all beings be safe from inner and outer dangers.
May all beings well in body and mind.
May all beings be at ease and happy.*

Evidence that LKM
may help reduce
-Anger
-Pain
-Distress

[Carson JW et al., Journal of Holistic
Nursing. 2005 Sep;23(3):287-304.]

And increase feelings
like
-Love
-Joy
-Hope
-Life satisfaction

[Fredrickson BL et al., J Pers Soc
Psychol. 2008 November; 95(5):
1045–1062]

Resources to help your practice

BOOKS


- *Mindfulness for Beginners* (cd or book; Jon Kabat-Zinn, 2011)
- *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain and Illness* (Jon Kabat-Zinn, 2013)
- *In This Moment: Five Steps to Transcending Stress Using Mindfulness and Neuroscience* (Kirk Strosahl & Patricia Robinson, 2015)
- *Radical Acceptance: Embracing Your Life with the Heart of a Buddha* (Tara Brach, 2011)
- *Practical Neuroscience of Mindfulness* (Rick Hanson, 2009)
- *Living Beyond Your Pain* (JoAnne Dahl & Tobias Lundgren, 2006)
- *Just One Thing* (Rick Hanson, 2011)
- *50 Ways to Soothe Yourself without Food* (Susan Albers, 2011)

WEBSITES

- <https://www.nytimes.com/guides/well/how-to-meditate>
- www.tarabrach.com
- <https://self-compassion.org>
- <https://swcmcenter.com/mindfulness> (Southwest Counseling and Mindfulness Center)

APPS

- Headspace & Insight Timer

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- Questions?
 - Ideas?
 - Insights?

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