**A Mindful Prayer Kyle A. Danemayer, PT** 

There is a new buzz in the holistic medical world --- mindfulness. It’s safe, easy to practice, as effective as taking medication, without any ill side effects, and applicable anywhere, anytime, and by anyone. The best part is there’s no copay. Mindfulness is an ancient exercise and used to be considered strange, unless, of course, you were a white bearded man inhabiting a mountaintop cave staring at your navel. In
the 1960's and 1970s, researchers learned of the multitude of benefits that mindful meditation had to offer as they began testing the effects of it. At the turn of the century, it finally started to gain popularity in the West and is starting to enter mainstream medicine.

**What is Mindfulness?**

Mindfulness is an act of intense focused concentration on an isolated thought, bodily sensation, and/or quality of our surrounding environment. It possesses similarities to meditative prayer, when one is focused specifically on God. During mindful prayer, one remains quiet, without mental converse, and as still as possible. Simply focus on the stillness of the physical body, sensing the presence of God within. In this way, a deep connection and understanding of our Almighty Creator’s intentions may be achieved.

Often times mindfulness is practiced strictly for medical purposes; namely, to train the mind. As equated to lifting weight to strengthen a muscle, mindfulness is practiced to be able to concentrate -- and avoid weakly wandering around on autopilot -- for longer and longer periods of time. As opposed to "zoning out," during meditation, mindfulness zones you in. Researchers and psychologists are now subjecting mindfulness to intense scrutiny, finding new uses for it in therapy, business and education, giving it the credibility it deserves.

**Spiritual Growth** 

Most of us live day to day surrounded by a figurative veil, unable to see the beauty of the world. We feel trapped by the requirements and pressures of life, always in a rush, without time to relax. Mindfulness forces us to take some time, for ourselves, and simply focus, which creates a “slowdown” of life. When we deliberately choose to concentrate, or even pause for even a moment, amazing things happen. The need to hurry or be finished dissolves. We can detach ourselves from the things that cause our stress: deadlines and proper outcomes. We metaphorically enter, what some label as, “the present”, where there are no regrets of the past or stress coming in the future. We gain freedom and experience life at a new higher quality with enhanced sensory input. Taste is a good example. Have you ever wondered why food seems to taste better at a restaurant? When we expect food to taste better, we deliberately focus on it, and sense it more.

The present can be a “present” in any daily activity, when mindful. Walking, exercising, praying, and breathing can elicit a deep sense of serenity, peace and confidence as mindfulness takes our focus off what makes us weak, and places it on our inner strength. It cultivates a sense of spirit, enabling us to don an imaginative shield of amour to deflect harmful influences. It’s like entering a safe and beautiful place with a deep feeling of unconditional love, for yourself and others. Some compare the realm of mindfulness to the Kingdom of Heaven, and even report miraculous spontaneous healing in this state of mind. One visit to this sacred place and you will long to go back, again and again.

**Health Benefits**

In addition to enlisting miracles, mindfulness may be prescribed as traditional medicine for its powerful positive health implications of enlisting the body’s own mechanisms for healing. Medical benefits include reduced blood pressure, heart rate, symptoms of PMS and physical pain; and can be used to boost immunity, benefit the body’s fascial connective tissue, and treat depression, to name a few.

Physiologically, brainwave frequencies change during mindful meditation. Gamma brainwaves, at 40-100 HZ, and Beta brainwaves, beating at 12-40 Hz allow us to be rational, problem solving beings. When Gamma and Beta wave become too high we experience excessive mind chatter, anxiety, panic and stress. Being mindful decreases the frequency of brain activity into Alpha waves, ranging from 7-12 Hz, and produces a relaxed state of mind with slower thoughts, accompanied by a serene feeling of peace and euphoria, like just before falling asleep. Blood tests reveal healing agents, like serotonin, the “happy” hormone, DHEA, an anti-aging factor, and HGH, or human growth hormone, which circulates in the body to grow and heal organs, bones and muscle tissue, release at the onset of Alpha brainwave activity. Cortisol and cytokine levels are found to decrease, both of which cause a stress reaction and cellular damage in the body. As slower levels of brainwave frequencies are reached, such as Theta waves (4-7 Hz), a subconscious state, and Delta waves (1-4 Hz), present during rejuvenating REM sleep, even more advance levels of healing occur. Studies show 20 minutes of mindful meditation is medically equivalent to 5 hours of sleep.

**How to be mindful**

There is no “wrong” way to be mindful. Many methods exist, and one of them will work best for you. Here are a few tips to get you started.

Focused concentration can be done with physical activity, yet may be easier initially when the body is at rest. Start with *The Statue* exercise. How long can you hold your entire body completely still, yet not rigid, without moving an eye or tongue or anything? Physical stillness creates mental stillness. Pretend you are intensely anticipating something while focusing on the inner sensations of the body, like light tingling or expansion. Success at deep stillness may produce an emotional release or the phenomenon of loss of time. This is an internal exercise of discipline and endurance.

*Mindful breathing* is as simple as “watching” your breath. Focus on expanding the stomach while inhaling to stretch the diaphragm. Slow the breath to a count of 7 seconds in and 7 seconds out. Relax the body so concentrating the mind will be easier. Beginners should be prepared for “mind sabotage” as the mind is programmed for survival, and at first, silence and stillness may be perceived as a threat. Think about it. The mind’s “job” is to think. As Descartes indicated, “I think, therefore I am”; these are the sentiments of the mind. It finds security in thinking, and may rev up, instead of relaxing, when you first attempt being mindful. Simply forgive the mind, and gently regain focus. Practice to improve.

Although, writer Deepak Chopra, reports being in a state of mindful meditation 100% of the time, mindfulness, like any skill, may take at least three months and 100-200 repetitions to consolidate. A few seconds of focused concentration should be celebrated during the early stages of your mindfulness career. It is advisable to seek coaching from a qualified individual. As a healthcare practitioner, I fully subscribe myself and prescribe my patients to practice mindful medicine with notable success. In addition, I currently offer private coaching lessons. Please call or email me at matrixdnpt@yahoo.com.

References:

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ira-israel/types-of-mindfulness_b_3347428.html>

<http://www.perthmeditationcentre.com.au/articles/mindfulness-or-meditation.htm>

Hal S. Blatman, M.D., Fascia Responds to Mindfulness and Meditation, *Natural Awakenings*, December 2015, pg. 9