

Tools For Success: Mindfulness

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Mindfulness is defined as a concentrated awareness of one's thoughts, actions, or motivations. This can be a very powerful tool when it comes to making changes in our daily lives. So often, we plow mindlessly through our days with blinders on, relying on our behavioral patterns to get us where we are going. How many times have you gotten to work and realized that you don't remember anything between leaving your house and reaching your workplace? How about returning to your desk after walking past the break room and realizing that you have a donut or a muffin in your hand that you don't even remember picking up? If we are not mindful of the things that we do, how effectively can we make conscious decisions to change?

I have personal experience with this autopilot phenomenon. Ever since I can remember, my grandmother has always kept fully stocked candy dishes in various areas of her house. I grew up right down the street from my grandparents and as a young boy, one of the first things that I would look forward to when visiting, after greeting my grandparents of course, would be exploring these dishes to see what treasures they held. As an adult, even during times of my strictest dieting, I still find myself being drawn straight to those dishes when I go to visit. I have literally caught myself standing in front of the candy dish with my hand outstretched, as though waking up from a trance, wondering how I made it into that room. I speak to others that experience similar situations regarding snacking at night. They explain that they sit down to watch TV and before they realize what happened, they have eaten a whole bag of Smartfood popcorn.

Becoming more mindful of the actions and behaviors that we are engaging in is the first step toward improving them. Only after we have done that can we hope to make lasting changes. In his book, *The Health Seeker's Handbook*, Bob Merberg writes that *"Full awareness of the present moment will reduce or eliminate the challenges you may encounter as you change your health behavior or any other aspect of your life."*

Bob Merberg goes on to list the benefits of becoming more mindful as:

- *Increase your awareness of what triggers unhealthy behaviors*
- *Help you keep unhealthy cravings at bay*
- *Elevate your sense of well-being – free from stresses about the future or the past – so you will intuitively take better care of yourself rather than trying to force it with willpower*
- *Enable you to cope with relapses without guilt and with overall equanimity*
- *Liberate you from comparing yourself to other people*
- *Provide you with a healthful means to deal with anger, anxiety, or feelings of low self-worth, so these common and deep-seated emotions don't undermine you*
- *Instruct you in how to "let go" of circumstances that keep you stuck*

His Recommendations on how Mindfulness can deliver immediate returns in your everyday life:

- *Practice mindfulness while eating – paying complete and quiet attention to the present moment and being aware of all perceptions related to eating – and you will find that you will naturally choose health foods, eat moderate portions, and "tune in" to your sense of satiation.*
- *Practice mindfulness while exercising, and you can eliminate boredom and shed those internal voices that generate reasons to not exercise.*
- *Practice mindfulness at work and when interacting with coworkers, and you will reduce your work-related stress.*