



WELCOA'S
spark16
IGNITE YOUR BEST YOU.

FEATURING
16 GREAT WAYS TO...
HELP YOU
BE MORE
MINDFUL
Pages 4-5

A MONTHLY HEALTHLETTER FROM THE WELLNESS COUNCIL OF AMERICA

Mindfulness Is Here To Stay!

Believe it or not, mindfulness is not a new concept. In fact, there have been a number of scientific studies demonstrating the benefits of mindfulness. Here's a quick summary of the findings:

Reduced stress. Many studies show that practicing mindfulness reduces stress. In fact, a meta-analysis of 39 studies found that mindfulness meditation decreases anxiety.

Increased cognitive capacity. Improvements to working memory appear to be another benefit of mindfulness. A 2010 study documented the benefits of mindfulness meditation among a military group who participated in an eight-week mindfulness training. The researchers found that the non-meditating military group had decreased working memory capacity over time, but the meditating military group experienced an increase in working memory capacity.

Enhanced focus. In one study, researchers compared a group of experienced mindfulness meditators with a control group that had no meditation experience. They found that the meditation group had significantly better performance on all measures of attention and had higher self-reported mindfulness.

Increased relationship satisfaction. Evidence suggests that mindfulness protects against the emotionally stressful effects of relationship conflict and is positively associated with the ability to express oneself.

Are You In The Now?

The Surprising Benefits Of Mindfulness

Have you ever started eating something, taken a couple of bites, then noticed all that was left was an empty bag? Or perhaps you've been at a great party but instead of enjoying it, all you can think about is tomorrow's to-do list. To be sure, we are often "not present" in our own lives. We often fail to notice what's going on around us—especially all of the wonderful blessings and other positive things in our lives.

While juggling work, home, finances, and countless other demands, it's all too easy to lose awareness of the present moment. However, tuning into the now, or more precisely, being "mindful" can provide several benefits—from increased tolerance to pain to increased relationship satisfaction. According to *Psychology Today*, **mindfulness** is a state of active, open attention on the present. Instead of letting your life pass you by, mindfulness means living in the moment. When you are mindful, you are less likely to get distracted and wish for things to be different, and you can therefore enjoy your life more fully.

How To Be Mindful

So, how do you actually practice mindfulness? There are many different techniques which can be implemented into your daily routine (check out our 16 tips to be mindful in this issue). If you are interested in pursuing mindfulness within a particular tradition, (i.e., Buddhist) you might want to seek a meditation instructor or take a class at a meditation center.



MORE HEALTH TIPS INSIDE



This Month's Recipe:

Homemade Veggie Pizza

This meal from Dr. Ann Kulze totally shatters the myth that eating pizza can't be part of a healthy diet! It also buries the misconception that making homemade pizza is a long and arduous task. Anyone can whip this wholesome pizza up in a flash.

Here is how you make this meal...

INGREDIENTS:

One 6–8 inch 100% whole wheat tortilla or 100% whole wheat pita pocket, slightly toasted

2–3 tbsp canned tomato paste (low-sodium is best)

¼ cup shredded part-skim mozzarella cheese or 2% milk cheese

1 cup baby spinach leaves or ½ cup thawed frozen spinach

3 tbsp chopped canned roasted red peppers

1 tbsp pine nuts (optional)

2 tbsp chopped fresh basil leaves

1 clove minced garlic

1 tbsp balsamic vinaigrette

INSTRUCTIONS:

Preheat oven to 375°. Spread the tomato paste evenly over the slightly toasted tortilla or pita bread.

Top with remaining ingredients in this order: cheese, spinach, peppers, pine nuts, basil and garlic.

Drizzle or sprinkle the balsamic vinaigrette evenly over the prepared pizza.

Carefully place the pizza on a cookie sheet sprayed with pan spray and place in the oven. Cook until the cheese melts and the spinach (if fresh) wilts (about 7–10 minutes).



Dr. Ann
Ann Kulze, M.D.

With formal training in nutrition and medicine, plus hands-on experience as a mother of four and family physician, Dr. Ann is a unique nutrition expert for the real world.

The whole food ingredients found in Dr. Ann's recipes are the right foods for health and vitality. Nutritional excellence naturally follows.

For more, visit DrAnnWellness.com.



SUPERSTAR FOOD OF THE MONTH—DARK, LEAFY GREENS

Dark, leafy greens are unequivocally a nutrient Goliath—packing in more nutrition per unit calorie than any other food. To give you perspective, 100 calories of kale provides 190x more calcium, 4x more iron, 12x more magnesium, 15x more folate, 800x more vitamin A and 11,000x more antioxidant power than 100 calories of sirloin. Enjoy some form of dark, leafy greens daily.



Foods That Make You **Happy** 😊

Not only are the foods below delicious and nutritious, but solid scientific research shows that they'll also boost your mood. Now that's something to smile about!

For some extra zip in your skip dig into the following:

Salmon: This healthy fish is rich in omega-3s, which have been shown to help ward off depression and mood swings.

Do it now: The Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the American Heart Association, and others suggest that you eat fish twice a week. Every week, plan two meals that you will eat fish, like salmon, and stick to it.

Spinach: This leafy green is packed with folic acid, a B vitamin that has been found to boost your mood.

Do it now: Add spinach to a smoothie. It's quick and easy, and a great way to get in a serving of this veggie.

Chicken: This protein staple provides vitamin B12. Research has shown that low B12 levels can leave you moody and tired.

Do it now: Bake some chicken breasts, dice them up and store them in your fridge, so you have a quick and handy way to toss this healthy protein into a salad, pasta dish, etc.

Lemons: Lemons offer anti-viral and immune-boosting properties. Moreover, they are a natural diuretic, meaning they can help remove extra fluid and toxins from the body. Doesn't everyone feel a bit happier when they're not bloated?!

Do it now: Fill a pitcher of water and squeeze some fresh lemon juice into it. Store it in your fridge and enjoy cold water with a hint of lemon.

Avocados: In addition to healthy fats, this delicious food contains serotonin, a feel-good neurotransmitter.

Do it now: Grab some guacamole the next time you're at the grocery store.



TIP OF THE MONTH

To improve the health and the taste of your diet, work towards constantly reinforcing to yourself how beneficial healthy foods are for your body and how harmful the unhealthy ones are. If you do, the good will taste better and the bad will taste worse. Try it, it works!



HELP YOU BE M



"Be thankful for what you have; you'll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don't have, you will never, ever have enough."

—Oprah Winfrey

1 Smile the second you wake up. There's scientific proof that your facial expressions can actually influence how you feel. So, set the tone of appreciation and awareness for the next 24 hours by simply waking up and smiling. Don't wake up with a groan and smash that alarm clock!

2 Clean out your closet. Sounds silly, but it works. Physical clutter can lead to mental clutter. A clean and organized house can help you feel a sense of calm.

3 Acknowledge anxiety, then let it go. Negative thoughts will always creep up, and that's ok. But holding on to anxiety and worry is not healthy. The next time you feel anxious, acknowledge it, then simply say to yourself, "This is me worrying, but now I'm going to let it go."

4 Set goals for the future, but work hard today. Big dreams and goals are motivating, but it's important to focus on what you can do in the moment. Nothing will help you achieve your goals faster than doing the best you can do today.

5 Take 60 seconds to notice and appreciate anything beautiful. Take notice of the beauty that surrounds you—a baby, a painting, a magnificent building, etc.

6 Take notice of what you're thinking. Are you constantly thinking about what needs to be done tomorrow? Always worrying about the future? Learn to recognize when you're doing this, and then bring yourself back to the present. Focus on what you're doing right now.

7 Do something for someone else. Random acts of kindness not only help others, but they can also bring you joy. When you live in the moment, you're more open and aware to these opportunities.

Remember to talk with your doctor if you have any concerns about your health.

Tips To MORE MINDFUL

8 Cut down on TV. Or other mindless activities like hours of web surfing that put you in a passive state of mind, and time slips silently by.

9 Participate in an engaging hobby. Devote time to activities that encourage you to look around and engage in your surroundings. Gardening, playing a team sport and playing an instrument are just a few examples of activities that lend themselves to mindfulness.

10 Accept conflict rather than running away from it. Break-ups, a lost job, home repairs—many negative feelings and situations simply can't be avoided. So, allow these emotions to be there as they are: don't try to change them. Acceptance relieves you of needless extra suffering.

11 Indulge your senses. Mindfulness is all about engaging your senses. Take time to smell fresh flowers, hug your children, savor a meal, observe a sunset, and/or listen to music.

12 Focus on your breathing every day. Whenever you are having a hard time staying in the now, take deep breaths, and focus on your breathing.

13 Do one thing at a time. You can't truly do something well if you're doing five other things.

***14 Spend five to 15 minutes each day doing nothing.** Sit in silence and reflect on the day and in your thoughts—what's gone well, what you're grateful for, etc.

15 Enjoy every bite of food. Many of us dine on the go, which doesn't allow us to savor and enjoy mealtime (a time meant for refreshment and revival). Savor each bite—you'll eat less this way too!

16 Set time aside to worry (if you must). Take some time to write down worrisome thoughts and then maybe a thought or two as to how you can address them. This way you won't spend all day in angst.



Yes, There's An App For That!

The Mindfulness App by MindApps guides you through mindfulness exercises and provides a variety of helpful tools.

Evidence suggests that mindfulness meditation has numerous health benefits, including increased immune functioning, improvement to well-being and reduction in psychological distress.

Warming Up...

To The Idea Of *Warming Up*

For many people, warming up may not seem that important or perhaps it's even viewed as a waste of time—especially if you're already crunched for time. However, skipping this crucial step in your exercise routine is usually a big mistake.

Why Warm Up?

Warming up provides your body with the stability and support it needs to safely and effectively begin exercise. With a warm up, you slowly increase your heart rate. This slow increase in heart rate provides several benefits such as increasing blood flow to your muscles, which helps minimize potential muscle tears and injury. It also prepares your muscles for more strenuous exercise.

Believe it or not, warming up actually lubricates your joints and increases the elasticity and flexibility of your tendons and ligaments.

For most people, a proper warm up should last around five to 10 minutes. A good warm up should include a few minutes of walking at a comfortable pace as well as some upper and lower body movements. Here are a few excellent warm up moves to get you started.



1 *Heel Raises*

Place your feet hip width apart. Next, raise up on the balls of your feet as high as you can, tighten calves, hold for two seconds, then lower down. Repeat 10-15 times.

2 *Ankle Circles*

Stand on your left leg with right foot extended in front of you. Next, make a circular motion with your right foot 10 times in each direction. Repeat with the other foot.

3 *Shoulder Circles*

Stand with your feet shoulder width apart, knees slightly bent and your arms extended out to your sides, raised to shoulder level and palms facing the floor. Next, begin to make small forward circular motions (about one foot in diameter) with your hands and arms in a controlled and slow fashion. Then begin to slowly increase the size of your shoulder arm circles by progressing to medium to larger circular motions, until you are reaching as far forward and back as you comfortably can (e.g. above your head and below your hips). Perform 10 times forward and 10 times backwards (reversing the motion).

Enjoy some light stretching and deep breathing before exercising!

Your #1 Financial Priority:

Building An Emergency Fund

Unexpected events are a fact of life. And when these unexpected events impact your personal finances, it's critical to be prepared. Without a doubt, a pillar of financial wellness is having a solid emergency fund of ready cash to pay for unexpected events, such as a major vehicle or home repair and/or the unexpected loss of income due to injury, illness or involuntary job termination.

If you already have three to six months of living expenses stocked away—congratulations! However, if you're like most working adults, you may not have that much (or anything) saved for a "rainy day." Moreover, if you're like most, it's not that you don't know you need an emergency fund, but rather, you don't know how or where to begin to build one.

Sobering Statistics

Tragedy and disaster can strike at any moment, and young, working Americans are certainly not exempt. Consider this:

- Just over one in four of today's 20 year-olds will become disabled before they retire.
- Over 36 million Americans are classified as disabled; about 12% of the total population.
- More than 50% of those disabled Americans are in their working years, from 18-64.



Despite what you might think you **can** build an emergency fund. It just takes a little diligence and creativity. Here are some practical tips to start your emergency fund:

✓ **Set up an account with automatic withdrawal.** The best place to put your emergency savings is in a savings or money-market account. The interest rates on these accounts are traditionally low, but your money will be safe and quickly accessible when you need it.

✓ **Set a specific goal and track it.** We set goals and timelines around practically any endeavor we pursue (i.e., losing weight, exercising, work projects, etc). Saving money shouldn't be any different. Set a specific goal, like "save \$10 a week" and track your progress regularly. Sign up for automatic alerts from your bank to remind you to set aside money into a savings account, and check your account balance regularly—seeing your money grow will help you stay motivated to save!

✓ **Go public with your goal.** Saving money can be especially hard if your spouse, family and friends don't know about it. So, inform them of your intentions. This way, they'll know not to tempt you to go shopping or out to lunch, etc. Better yet, maybe they'll join you in your efforts.

✓ **Commit to one money-saving change.** Take some time to review your spending habits and identify one area you can cut back on or eliminate. Two or three fewer café lattes a week could save you about \$40 a month. Take that money and place it in your emergency fund.

✓ **Keep your change.** Place any loose change or dollar bills in a change jar. It may sound silly now, but try it. You'll be shocked at how much can pile up from the change in your pocket or in between couch cushions.

Remember, **six months is ideal**, but you'll be reasonably prepared if you have **at least three months** saved in a savings-type account.

In every issue you'll find 16 ridiculously simple ways to stay healthy!

IN THIS ISSUE

- » Foods that will make you smile
- » 16 strategies to help you live in the now
- » Easy ways to pad your emergency fund
- » Are you skipping a critical step in your workout?



DID YOU KNOW?

2x

THE DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR AMERICANS, THE AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION AND OTHERS SUGGEST THAT YOU EAT FISH TWICE A WEEK.

50%
 MORE THAN HALF OF DISABLED AMERICANS ARE IN THEIR WORKING YEARS, FROM 18-64.

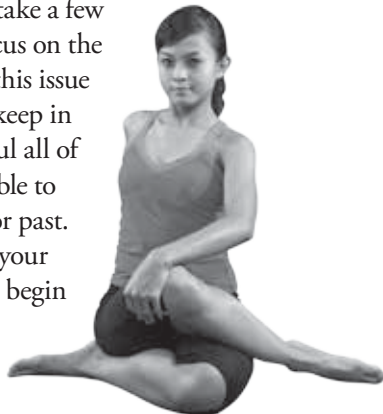
3 to 6
 months

AIM TO HAVE THREE TO SIX MONTHS OF LIVING EXPENSES IN YOUR EMERGENCY FUND.

More On Mindfulness

The practice of mindfulness has been around for a long time. In fact, its roots trace back to more than 2,000 years ago as a Buddhist concept. The practice has since evolved and spread to several other disciplines, including yoga, tai chi and qigong (pronounced chee-gong; it's a form of meditation that focuses on breathing).

Of course, you don't have to change your religious denomination or join a yoga class to practice the concept of mindfulness. You can simply take a few minutes out of your day to focus on the present (use the tips inside of this issue for ideas and strategies). Also keep in mind that you can't be mindful all of the time. It's virtually impossible to never think about the future or past. The key is to be aware when your thoughts wander or when you begin to obsess or spend too much time worrying about any time other than now.



What's In A Number?

TIME SPENT

WEEKS

The amount of time you could be out of commission if you jump into vigorous exercise without a proper warm up.

TIME SPENT

10
 MINUTES

Just 10 minutes of warming up (slow-paced walking and upper and lower body movements) can prepare your body for exercise and prevent injury.