

MINDFULNESS AND MENTAL HEALTH

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Mental Health is a state of wellbeing where an individual is able to realize his/her potential, able to cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to contribute to community. In recent years mental health world over has become increasingly challenged, aggravated further by the Covid 19 pandemic. Data suggests that 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem every year. Worldwide, anxiety and depression are the most common mental health disorders. The World Health Organization has indicated that depression is likely to overtake cardiovascular disease as the single most common chronic disease by 2030.

Lifestyle factors such as stress, poor nutrition, lack of exercise, social isolation and more can contribute to poor mental health. As the world faces a stress epidemic, enhancing stress resiliency is a key intervention in promoting mental wellbeing.

Mindfulness developed by Dr Jon Kabat Zin is the psychological process of bringing one's attention to the internal and external experience occurring in the present moment. This can be developed through the practice of meditation, yoga and other training. Mindfulness has been shown to build stress resilience and mitigate the impact of stress. Mindfulness intervention helps to downregulate the amygdala and activates the parasympathetic nervous system thus activating the relaxation response. This in turn decreases the production of stress hormones and promotes the production of neurotransmitters such as serotonin, dopamine and GABA. Mindfulness promotes physical, mental, emotional and psychological wellbeing.

Mindfulness has emerged as a promising intervention in the management of stress and promotion of a healthy mind given the multitude health benefits attributed to this practice and few contraindications or side-effects. Mindfulness can also be integrated with other modalities of treatment including modern medicine.