

Debunking the Myths of Mindfulness

Some of the popular images and ideas surrounding mindfulness are just plain wrong. When you sit down and do it for yourself, you may find things are different from what they seemed before you tried it for yourself. You'll probably be pleasantly surprised.

1

It's about stopping thoughts

Whenever there's a newspaper story about meditation, they trot out a piece of art that depicts a person in flowing clothes with a blissful smile that suggests they've emptied out their brain and replaced it with cotton candy. Meditation does not involve ending the thought process. It isn't about trying to achieve a particular state of mind. It is simply taking the time to become familiar with how your thought process actually works, since you have the best vantage point to view what's going on in your own mind. Once you see that, you don't stop thoughts, but they might not control you quite so much.

2

It's only for laid-back people

People who are energetic and hard-charging should steer clear of meditation and leave it to the folks who would rather traipse barefoot through a mountain meadow for the rest of their lives. If you're aggressive and thrive on action, meditation will just drive you crazy. Here we go again—another complete misconception. Everyone, no matter what their lifestyle is, needs time to recharge and regroup and reflect. Mindfulness practice is one of the best ways to give your mind a true rest—and emerge refreshed to take on new challenges.

3

It's an escape from reality

Meditation is nothing more than another substitute for sex, drugs, and rock and roll, a way to avoid the hard facts of life. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Far from being an escape, mindfulness takes you right into the heart of reality, where you get to see how your thoughts shape your perceptions of what you experience, how the activities in your mind causes yourself and others pain and suffering, and what motivates you to do what you do. It's not an escape, or even a vacation. It's a journey within, which helps you see reality better—to more readily distinguish what's real from what you fabricate.

4

You lose your edge

"I've got responsibilities. There's no way I can sit around contemplating my navel. It will just make me too soft." The myth here is that meditation involves a day-dreamy fuzzy state of mind, sort of like sleeping while you're still awake. Nope. Practicing mindfulness isn't about zoning out. It's about zoning in. You train yourself to pay closer attention than you might normally be used to, and this kind of focus rubs off on the rest of your life. It can actually help you to get into "the zone" and stay there longer.

5

It's selfish

Mindfulness is a "me generation" thing. It's all about getting some "me time." It's true that meditation practice, even when you do it in a group, is time alone, but it's not selfish. The relaxation and focus that comes with mindfulness practice can help you to listen better, pay more attention to the needs of others, and be present with your loved ones with less distraction. Your own mindfulness can be a gift to others in your life.