

Balance



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WEIGHT-LOSS DANCE

It's often one step
forward, two back

SWEET SMELL OF THERAPY

Essential oils a growing trend

PRE-WORKOUT DRINKS

Experts warn they may
be harmful

MAINTAINING FOCUS

Meditation increases
concentration, acceptance



TRIBUNE/KYLE MILLS

Jamie Derrick leads a group of students, teachers and employees at University of Idaho in mindful meditation recently between classes on the Moscow campus.

Maintaining focus

Mindfulness meditation increases concentration, acceptance

BY CHELSEA EMBREE

Say the word “meditation” and the image many people think of is sitting still, eyes closed, trying to clear the mind.

The opposite is the case.

“It doesn’t involve clearing anything,” said Jamie Derrick, who teaches and practices mindfulness-based meditation in Moscow. “How I think of it is just training attention.”

There’s a variety of types of meditation, but in mindfulness practices, the goal is exercising focus and concentration — and,

perhaps most important, acceptance.

“In my teaching, I talk about it as the two arms of a hug or the two wings of a bird. It’s training attention and this kind of welcoming attitude of whatever’s there,” Derrick said.



Jamie Derrick
TRIBUNE/KYLE MILLS

This isn’t the easiest task, Derrick noted.

Dave Potter, a counselor at Moscow’s Counseling Center of the Palouse, said his mindfulness class participants almost “uniformly” think they’re doing something wrong when they don’t arrive at a peaceful place with no thoughts.

“Their mind is busy and they’re thinking

about the day and about their concerns,” he said. “It’s possible the thoughts can stop. ... But the rest is really important. The stuff that comes up about your day and the stuff that comes up about your family — that’s important.”

When the mind inevitably wanders off, the teachings of mindfulness meditation say a person can — and should — recognize their thoughts and gently guide themselves back to their focus, whether that focus is breath, the body or an image.

“It seems like the point is being in focus and staying in that focus, but in the way I’ve been trained and the way I teach, it’s about including all of it,” Potter said. “If you exclude this part of your experience and say, ‘Well, that’s not important,’ then there’s some kind of subtle internal violence going on there.”

Employing that kindness is where the broad health benefits of mindfulness meditation come into play.

"The health benefits are mostly stress-related," Derrick said.

Scientific studies have shown people experience better sleep, less anxiety and depression and benefits to the cardiovascular system, she added, and people can start seeing those results after eight weeks.

People also tend to perform better.

"The parts of the brain involved in attention and focus get stronger, and the parts of the brain that are emotionally activated — especially negative emotions — get less active," Derrick said. "The brain just gets stronger. ... It's a more efficient processing system."

What sustains a practice, Derrick believes, are the personal benefits people notice. One that she thinks is always implicit is introspection.

"Meditation brings you into really close connection with your own experience," she said. "I think just being in touch with it means that we're more likely to make choices that are going to be in alignment with what you most value and what is best for you, and that just leads to good outcomes."

To start a mindfulness meditation practice, Derrick recommends attending a class. She and Potter both offer courses that meet once a week over a period of eight weeks.

"I always encourage a class and a teacher because it helps with motivation, it helps with support, it helps with a routine so you stick to it," Derrick said.

Outside of classes, Derrick said it's important to keep up the practice to see results — just like going to the gym regularly to get in shape. Leaders in the field recommend a daily practice of about 30 minutes, but Derrick said recent research shows smaller amounts of time spent in meditation are still effective.

"Any amount of time spent in concentrated focus is really beneficial," she said. "You can bring your focus to washing your dishes or when you're showering. ... A lot of it has to do with remembering that it's important to focus."

MINDFULNESS MEDITATION RESOURCES

Groups:

- Palouse Zen Community, 106 E. Third St., Moscow, 7 p.m. Thursdays
- UUCP Buddhist Fellowship, 420 E. Second St., Moscow, 7 p.m. first and third Tuesdays
- Golden Blue Lotus Tara, 937 N. Grant St., Moscow, 10:30 a.m. Sundays
- Pullman Buddhist Meditation, Pioneer Center gym, 240 S.E. Dexter, Pullman, 6:15 p.m. Sundays

Free eight-week course, along with additional readings and videos: palousemindfulness.com
Free guided meditations: marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22

OTHER TYPES OF MEDITATION

Guided meditation: A guide or teacher leads a person through a visualization exercise, in which the person forms an image of a place or situation they find relaxing using all five senses.

Mantra meditation: A person silently repeats a calming word, thought or phrase to prevent distraction.

Transcendental meditation: Like mantra meditation, a person repeats a calming word, thought or phrase in a specific way, allowing the body to settle into a state of profound rest and allowing the mind to relax and find peace.

Qi Gong: A part of traditional Chinese medicine, this practice combines meditation, physical movement and breathing exercises to restore and maintain balance.

Tai Chi: This is a form of gentle Chinese martial arts. A person performs a series of postures or movements at their own pace in a slow, graceful manner while practicing deep breathing.

Yoga: A person performs a series of postures while controlling their breath, leading to a more flexible body and a calmer mind.

Source: Mayo Clinic

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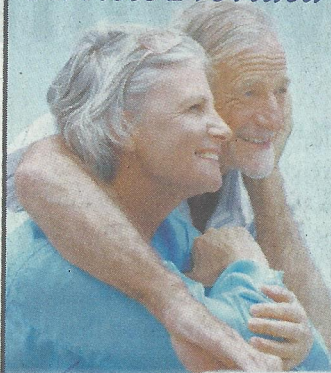


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