

Mindfulness Makes for Better Brains

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Here's the crazy thing. I recently took a mindfulness certification course, which was fantastic, but which included a couple of "immersive weekends"—in other words, participants spend the entire weekend in an online zoom course. That said, these weekends were really nothing short of incredible. We mediated. We learned the science supporting mindfulness practices. We meditated some more. We practice-taught meditations in break-out rooms with people from all over the world (I was lucky enough to practice with someone in Panama, and another person in Spain, as well as really interesting people from D.C.—another lawyer, actually—and Dallas, and Seattle). And we meditated some more. Basically, we did an incredible amount of meditating, while practicing teaching and building community. At the end of day 4, I had some work to catch up on.

To my surprise, despite having spent days immersed in the zoom world and learning, and which would normally have left me tired and pretty inefficient, I plowed through that work with what felt like increased comprehension and efficiency.....and enjoyment. Yes. Enjoyment.

It turns out, science supports my experience. Even a simple 2-week course in mindfulness improved cognitive functioning and decreased distracting thoughts while increasing working memory capacity. [Mrazek, Franklin, Phillips \(2013\)](#). This comes as no surprise, given that fMRIs show that the pre-frontal cortex, responsible for executive functioning (i.e. thinking, focusing, and managing emotional reactions) and insular cortex (brain regions serving sensory, emotional, motivational and cognitive functions) both increase blood flow with mindfulness ([Deepeshwar, Vinchurkar, 2017](#)), while reducing the amygdala's response (the part of the brain responsible for fight or flight). [Taren, Gianaros, 2015](#).

So, the bottom line is pretty simple: Mindfulness practices, which includes meditation, makes us smarter and more efficient, and perhaps more importantly, more capable of enjoying what we are doing in the moment.

Resources for a beginner practice (also good for more advanced!):

No one needs a fancy practice. No gear needed. You don't need a special cushion or chair or incense. You just need you and maybe 10 minutes. Some great resources to check out the different kinds of mindfulness practices include the following:

[Insight Timer](#) (FREE meditation app, thousands of meditations of various types and lengths). It can be a little overwhelming, but a great place to start is with something that interests you.

[10 Percent Happier](#) (Free trial available, as well as a free podcast with many interesting mindfulness leaders and teachers). Kind of a great app, I think, because it was, in part, developed by Dan Harris, a very type-A well-known TV journalist, and if he can do it, anyone of us can. Meditations are usually about 10 minutes. Cool courses available that break down mindfulness into an understandable and do-able practice.

[Headspace](#) (Free trial available). Great at simplifying this whole thing. 10 minute meditations.