

Mindfulness Meditation Workshop

The views of the facilitator are his own. There are multitudes of approaches to meditation and this workshop is a reflection of the facilitator's experience. That stated, there is an enormous amount of research over the last few years that has given us a better idea of what happens in the brain when we meditate and how meditation brings us long term benefits. Meditation, for example:

- Helps to slow down aging of the brain
- Increases thickness in parts of the brain to do with memory and learning
- Reduces mind-wandering and the stress that results from "race brain".
- Increases the thickness of parts of the brain connected with emotional regulation
- Improves concentration
- Reduces our susceptibility to anxiety and depression
- Helps us tolerate pain
- Reduces feelings of isolation

In meditating we are exercising and thickening the parts of the brain that regulate the amygdala, which has a primary role in the processing of certain primal emotional responses, such as fear and anxiety. Encouraging the amygdala to shrink, meditation leads to long-term positive changes in our emotional being.

Neuroscientists can actually see the changes taking place in the brain. They can see them happening over a timescale of a few weeks, rather than the years we might assume they might require. Most scientific trials last only eight weeks. And in many of those trials, participants are meditating for an average of around 20 minutes. That isn't a lot of time!

If you're one of those people who assumes that somehow you're not cut out for meditation, then perhaps you will find confidence in knowing that exercising the brain is, in many respects, exactly like exercising the body. Just as repeated physical exercise will inevitably promote muscle growth and flexibility, so repeated meditation will help promote brain growth and emotional resilience.

Recommended reading:

A Gradual Awakening by Stephen Levine

Meditation for Beginners by Jack Kornfield

The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation by Thich Nhat Hanh

A Still Forest Pool by Achaan Chah

Seeking The Heart of Wisdom by Joseph Goldstein and Jack Kornfield

The Untethered Soul by Michael Singer

Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind by Shunryu Suzuki

For your Smartphone:

I strongly recommend an app called Insight Timer. It features a timer for silent meditating, as well as guided meditations. Also, an app called Calm has wonderful guided meditations and music for meditating and listening to prior to sleeping. iCalm, another app (free) offers “mini” meditative practice for those moments when we are agitated or doubtful and need to pause.