

Mindfulness can help tame everyday stress

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(HealthDay)—Being in tune with the present moment—called mindfulness—can relieve stress and make you an actor rather than a reactor, a wellness expert says.

Focusing on what's happening right now allows people to notice things they might otherwise miss, said Dr. Timothy Riley. He is an assistant professor in the family and community medicine department at Penn State Health.

That might sound simple enough. But being engaged in the present moment, on purpose and non-judgmentally, can be a challenge, he said.

"Being aware of physical sensations, thoughts and emotions—both pleasant and unpleasant—can help us choose how to respond, rather than simply react," Riley said in a Penn State news release.

Each individual's upbringing and genes have programmed how they approach situations, he explained. A person's automatic reactions can be spot on—or not.

"You walk by Starbucks, see a cookie and you have an [emotional response](#)," he said. "You want the cookie. Then may come guilt for wanting a cookie."

If you're mindful, you see the cookie, are aware of your emotional response, and you can let it be without judgment, Riley added.

"It puts you in this observer stance where we can witness what is happening without getting wrapped up in it," he said. "It gives you a bit of space."

That moment can help you decide if buying the cookie is wise and if you really need it now, he said.

Many studies have shown how mindfulness and related interventions can help reduce stress and [chronic health problems](#), such as anxiety, depression, pain and [high blood pressure](#).

"Being focused on the [present moment](#) has a number of positive effects on our everyday life. Usually, whatever is happening right now isn't really that bad, and realizing that can put us in a more positive frame of mind. Then, our next interaction is better," Riley explained.

Mindfulness also enhances activity in the [part of the brain](#) that helps quell your inner child who wants to scream, yell, cry, hit or throw a fit, he noted.

"The more we practice [mindfulness](#), the more we are flexing this muscle of emotional regulation," Riley said. "When automatic emotions come up, we can choose whether or not to engage them."

More information: The U.S. National Institutes of Health has more about [mindfulness](#).

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