



SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation

WORDS ABOUT WELLNESS

Today's "Words About Wellness" is brought to you by:

Susan Gaylord, PhD
Associate Professor
Director of the Program on Integrative Medicine
UNC Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation



Mindfulness at Work - Enhancing Performance while Lowering Stress

These are challenging times. The ongoing stressors of everyday life have been joined by the larger stresses precipitated by the coronavirus pandemic, social unrest, and environmental calamities. Our world has turned upside down, and coping with the "new normal" may be a source of anxiety, heightened vigilance, emotional turmoil, and burnout. With work shifting to home, and school shifting to home or online, terms such as the 24-hour day and insufficient bandwidth take on greater meaning. How do we maintain a fresh and resilient mind?

Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn's timelessly relevant book, *Full Catastrophe Living*, teaches that the discipline of mindfulness, and the awareness that is generated as a result of mindfulness practice, are effective in lowering stress, decreasing symptoms of illness, and increasing wellbeing. Moreover, a burgeoning research literature points towards the powerful impact of mindfulness on workplace wellness and work-life balance. Organizations are increasingly adopting mindfulness to improve workplace functioning and to enhance work-related performance.

A sampling of recent research includes the following benefits of mindfulness, which relate to work

- performance and job satisfaction;
- improves focus, precision, and judgment;
- Enhances ability to regulate emotions;
- Shifts ability to perceive positive outcomes;
- Enhances creativity;
- Facilitates positive behavior change;
- Decreases perceived stress;
- Decreases burnout;
- Increases job satisfaction;
- Increases resilience.

The format for mindfulness training of employees varies. Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), usually taught to groups in eight weekly sessions plus a Saturday retreat, is the most common format, but adaptations include holding fewer or briefer sessions, providing lunch-and-learn introductions or holding mini-retreats. With the advent of the recent pandemic, online formats are becoming quite common. For

example, at UNC we have taught mindfulness to employees who are working from home, in brief early morning sessions prior to their work-day.

For more information on mindfulness programs, including adapting mindfulness training for specific needs and settings, contact UNC Program on Integrative Medicine at 919-966-8586.