



Mindfulness for Your MS Toolbox

Presented by:

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Yahaira Rivera:

Hello, everyone. Welcome to MSAA's live webinar, "Mindfulness: A Coping Tool for Your MS Toolbox," with mindfulness expert Mindy Eisenberg. Thank you for taking the time to join us today. My name is Yahaira Rivera, and I'm the Director of Mission Delivery and Program Development for MSAA and your host for the program.

Before starting our webinar, I would like to share some information about MSAA and review housekeeping items and reminders. MSAA is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to improving lives today through vital services and support for the MS community. Some of our programs and services include a national helpline providing free English and Spanish services, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time, an Equipment and Cooling Distribution program with products designed to improve safety and mobility and to help with heat sensitivity. We also offer educational programs, online tools, publications and digital resources to help you and your family members stay informed. Additionally, we offer support through Community Connection to help you stay connected with other members of the MS community. For more information about our programs and services, please visit our website, mysaa.org.

During tonight's program, you will have the opportunity to submit your questions by typing them into the Q&A chat box. As time permits, we'll address some of the questions during the Q&A portion of tonight's webinar. Also, please know that this program is being recorded and will be available as an on-demand video on our MSAA's Video Library within the next couple of weeks. Finally, at the end of the program, we ask that you please complete a brief survey. Your feedback is extremely important to ensure that our programs are relevant and impactful. A link to the survey will be included in the chat box.

And this is a friendly reminder: Please know that this program is for educational and informational purposes only, and does not constitute formal recommendations. Please speak with your doctor or healthcare provider team for specific questions or concerns.

And now I am pleased to introduce our speaker for this evening. Mindy Eisenberg is the founder and director of Yoga Moves MS, a nonprofit organization with the mission of improving the quality of life for individuals with MS, Parkinson's Disease, and neuromuscular conditions. Mindy has a Bachelor of Science from Northwestern University and a Master of Health Services Administration from the University of Michigan. And she was trained at the University of Massachusetts Center for Mindfulness to be a qualified mindfulness-based stress reduction

teacher. Mindy is also a certified yoga teacher, Buteyko breathing instructor, Reiki master, and author of “Adaptive Yoga Moves Anybody,” created for individuals with MS and neuromuscular conditions and “Adaptive Yoga Cards” daily yoga moves for all ages and abilities. Mindy has provided therapy to individuals with mobility challenges for over 18 years, and she thrives on building a strong and mighty community for her students and families. Welcome, Mindy. We are so happy to have you.

Mindy Eisenberg:

Thank you. I'm so happy to be here. Yoga moves MS has been in existence for almost 19 years. During this time I studied mindfulness based stress reduction. I was honored to study with Jon Kabat-Zinn in one of his last trainings that he did through the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

So today, our topic is mindfulness as a coping tool. Hopefully you'll take some of what we share today and put it in your toolbox for coping with life, or as Jon Kabat-Zinn likes to say, the full catastrophe. And what he means by that is the full experience of living. So I'm going to share with you a few definitions of mindfulness, and you'll notice some similarities in words that keep popping up. Mindfulness asks us, are we living our lives? Does it really matter by living now, by living in the now, the present moment? My favorite one is by Jon Kabat-Zinn, which is “The intention to pay attention,” the intention, that’s what makes this different, I’m making an intention to be present with you here tonight, so on purpose, in this moment, on this Wednesday evening, without judgment and with compassion. And we’ll talk about that a little bit more, because that can get tricky.

Another definition is “mindfulness is an innate human capacity.” And that's what I like about this one is the ability to be mindful is already within you, we just have to tap into it. So, to deliberately pay full attention to where we are, to this actual experience, and learn from it. You're already seeing a pattern in that some of these words - attention, awareness, now, present moment. Mindfulness is not complicated, the principles are fairly simple, but the practice, that's where the challenge comes in, is the actual daily practice of it. So I love this one, “Mindfulness is also called ‘heartfulness.’” So it's helping open up your heart. It's a process of awakening. Again this word “intentionally” to be here, you're paying attention not only what is going on outside of you, but within you throughout your day.

So here we are, mindfulness is attending to the present moment. You can consider it a state of awareness, and we attune to it through some innate focal points that we have within us. So we have breath, we can hear sound around us and inside, and we have physical sensations. So mindfulness is a way to help us deal with life's stressors. When they decided to name the program Mindful Day Stress Reduction, they started out in a pain clinic and then they realized pain is stress and stress is pain. So pain can be both physical and emotional. When we're looking at mindfulness, we're looking at our breath, we're looking at sounds, sensations, and then as we practice, we get to look at those waves, the thoughts, the feelings and the emotions that come and go, the pleasure, the pain, the loss, the gain and knowing that things change over time.

So we know stress is this transaction. It's what happens when we interact with our environment, a person, a place a thing. And we also know that at least 50% of individuals with MS are going to experience some type of anxiety and depression. Mindfulness is known to help this in addition to physical pain. So there's a little bit of misunderstanding out there, mindfulness is not necessarily relaxing. It can be when we practice breath awareness, which we're going to do in a moment, it can be very relaxing and calming, and we hope that it is. But it isn't necessarily. It's

also not about “if I do this, I'm going to get this,” “If I practice mindfulness, my pain's going to go away,” “If I practice mindfulness, my relationship's going to improve.” It's not about stopping the thoughts.

So the reality is that our mind, our brain is intended, it was created to think. So, the thoughts are not going to go away. So you'll hear a lot of people say, I have to practice mindfulness and get my thoughts to go away. Or they'll say, I can't do mindfulness because I can't stop my thoughts. Well, they are right that they can't stop the thoughts, but we can slow them down. You can think of it like a snow globe that you shake and all the snowflakes are all over. And those can resemble your thoughts. But then we place the snow globe back down on a surface, and the snowflakes relax and tend to fall down. And you can think of your thoughts in the same way. When we practice mindfulness, our thoughts will settle down over time.

So I think this study is very important, that was done at Harvard, and what they found was our wandering mind is actually not a happy mind. It's not a mind at ease. And this was a huge study with, over 250,000 subjects. It has a lot of reliability, and you might want to take a look at it. But the idea, where does this go with mindfulness, is that if we can slow down this wandering mind, we can bring this skill in, we might just feel more at ease and potentially increase our happiness and joy in life.

So you can think of yourself as the sky, this is by Pema Chodron, beautiful meditation practitioner and teacher, and she says, “You're the sky and everything else is the weather.” So, the thoughts, the emotions, the chaos going on around you, that's the weather. But you are actually the sky. You are the stillness. And then here we are, “Be here now. Be someplace else later. Is that so complicated?” And like we said, it's really not complicated. What we're going to talk about this evening isn't complicated, but it's a practice that can be super challenging. And so we have to start with where we're at. We start with where we're at right now. And you've already had a day. The day has gone by. Wherever you're living, it's a certain time. And what came before? Was it sleep? Was it eating? Did you come out of a meeting? Where you working? Where you relaxing? That's going to change your experience.

So there's a few foundations that we put in our toolbox. What are the essential foundations of mindful this that you want to put in your toolbox, when we're thinking in mindfulness? And the first one is a beginner's mind. So when we're doing this practice, it's like we act like we've never done it before. And this sense of beginner's mind can actually bring in this sense of “oh” and awe as though you've never seen it before. When you think of kids and you show something or that they've never seen before, and they get so excited, and so we want to tap into that ability to go back to the beginner's mind.

It is a practice of letting go, of letting go. A thought comes in, an emotion comes in, we let that go together with our breath, which we're going to practice. It is a practice. And so it does take patience. It's not going to happen tonight. You will not be an expert in mindfulness and be able to sit for 45 minutes tonight. And we call it a practice because every time we sit, we're sitting anew, we're beginning again. We bring in this idea, as we saw in the definitions, of trying to refrain from judging ourselves, so we don't want to judge the judge.

This, again, is a practice to realize when we are judging ourselves because we don't always realize it. And what I really love about it is this idea of showing loving kindness and compassion to yourself and others. And when I was first studying this and I practice a loving kindness meditation, I thought, how does this work? But I realized as we practice it, the more you say it to yourself, the more your body absorbs what you're saying and it really comes into your cells, of

your body. We have this neuroplasticity. We're opening neural pathways. And as we do this practice, it starts to integrate within us. It comes into our very being. So we have to have patience and trust. I can tell you that John Kabat-Zinn studied for over, it's over 30 years now, and the studies are incredible. In fact, someone asked about the studies and we're going to talk about them, but the slope is upwards now with how many studies on mindfulness are showing how it improves quality of life.

So I love some of these sayings: "The present moment is underrated, but it's anything but ordinary." And that gets back to our beginner's mind and the sense of awe. And the more we create these circumstances that we have this sense of awe, then it starts to integrate into our day and becomes more of... we find it naturally when we're waking up. You might just go, wow, my toothpaste is... I'm brushing my teeth and my teeth are getting cleaner. Something we do every day we take for granted. But it works like somebody invented toothpaste and you can have a sense of awe about that. Almost anything we do. How about the miracle of the body? And one of the comments I love is, "there's more right with you than wrong with you." And that's also a saying by Jon Kabat-Zinn, there is more right with you than is wrong with you, if we develop the sense of awe, of the miracle of our body and of this life.

So there is a resistance when we practice mindfulness, this is some of the challenge. Anne Lamot says, "mM mind is a neighborhood, I try not to go alone," because mindfulness, being with ourselves can be scary. The goblins could come out. And so we have to face our inner demons when we sit. But there's a way to do it skillfully so we don't get so scared. And we might just dip our toes in the water and you might find it's not so bad, sometimes it's what we tell ourselves, the story that we tell ourselves. We have this inner critic that tells us you're not good at that, or you can't do that, or I can't do that. They can do that, but not me. And this practice asks us to take a chance, to take a chance and we might even invite that inner critic to sit down and have a cup of tea with us instead of pushing it away. When we resist, it creates more pain, more stress. But what if we invited this stress to sit down and have a neighborly chat? So "if your compassion doesn't include yourself, it's incomplete." And I love this, how loving kindness and compassion is one of the fundamental principles of mindfulness.

So life is the laboratory and no matter what we're doing, we can practice mindfulness. Let's start by practicing with the breath. So wherever you're at you could be seated, standing, or lying down. You choose a place. If you're seated, and you might sit down on a chair where your spine can be nice and tall, and if you're lying down, that's absolutely fine. We're going to play with breath awareness. So breath awareness isn't something that you do wrong, and that goes for mindfulness in general, something's not good or bad. And so when you practice this try not to think of it like "I'm not doing it right." Let's just pay attention to breathing. So with a nice tall spine, finding a comfortable seat, or perhaps you want to stand or lie down, that's all fine. And if you're seated, you might want to lengthen up through your upper body and rest your arms in your lap. And then you decide whether you'd like your eyes open or closed, or perhaps, we call it a half-gaze, when they're halfway closed, you might look downward or forward with these open or closed eyes and tune in to the fact that you are breathing. Do this by feeling your breath.

So as you breathe in, you might feel some movement in your belly. Just notice it and then exhale. Let it go. We're going to breathe in and breathe out. You might take one hand to your belly, so if we take one or both hands, if you take your hands to your belly, you're touching your body. Part of this awareness is feeling your hands touching your body. And as you breathe in, you might feel the belly expanding. And then as you breathe out, you may feel the belly relax back down. We're breathing in and we're breathing out. The breath becomes our anchor of

awareness. Now, undoubtedly, your mind is going to waver when we're focusing on the breath. The mind's going to go, "when is she going to talk about this?" or "my hand's getting tired," or "I want to shift my movement." And that is all okay, because you are aware that you want to do this, and so you are making a choice. If you need to move to get more comfortable, you acknowledge it and you do it.

And then we return to the act of breathing. Breathing in, feel the beginning, the middle, and the end of the inhale. And then we exhale out, feeling likewise, beginning middle and end. And so this is a circular pattern of this inhalation and exhalation. We feel the act of breathing. You may feel the air coming in and out through your nose. You may feel the belly as it expands and then as it softens back down. So try just for a few seconds without me talking. Just for a few moments. I'm not going to tell you how long, but just feel and attune to your breath just as it is. And if you notice that you're judging yourself, just say to yourself, oh, thinking, and return to your breath. Return to your breath. Breathing in and breathing out. And breathing in and breathing out. At your own pace. Without trying to change anything. Feeling the sensation of breathing.

And you may notice that you feel the sensation in one area more than the other. And you might make that your focal point, such as the nose or the belly. Or you may focus on the body as a whole, feeling the breath and noticing that the body is breathing as a whole. As you are a human being. A human being, so we're just being right here. You may think of the inhale as "let's" and the exhale as "go." You could add that into your breath awareness, that breathing in is the "let's" and the breathing out is the "go." And then softly let the breath awareness practice go for now, for now, just let it go and let's be right back here together.

And we'll just review that if you take away nothing this evening but breath awareness, that is the number one coping tool that you have in your toolbox at all times. It is a natural focal point. And I know someone asked about could it be used when doing an MRI? And the answer is absolutely. Several of my students, when they first learned breathing, they realized right away that when they were having their MRI and that caused some stress, that coming to the breath awareness tool was right there for them. You might notice that you feel more relaxed when you're practicing your breathing, and that is a known response. The breathing practice will stimulate the relaxation response for many. And again, it won't necessarily be relaxing, but very often it is.

So there's many types of mindfulness practices. We just did breath awareness. And we're going to do a body scan in a bit. Meditation is what a lot of people think about and, perhaps, maybe one of the more scary types of mindfulness, thinking that you have to sit for anywhere from 10 to 45 minutes. And the reality is, you don't. I'm here to tell you that you could start with 30 seconds, which we actually did when we did the breath awareness, or a minute. And then over time, you might increase the time. And, if you were to take a formal mindfulness based stress reduction program, they would have you do the body scan first.

Yoga or mindful movement is a type of mindfulness practice. And it doesn't have to be yoga. But for instance, perhaps you take your right arm and you lift it to your ability up towards the sky, and you pay attention to this sensation of moving the arm. And then as you exhale, you pay attention and feel, feel the sensation of lowering the arm back down. That's mindful movement. It creates this mind, body, breath connection. There's mindful listening, which involves listening without commenting. And there's the more traditional method that when you're listening to somebody you might, like, bob your head or say, "mm-hmm, mm-hmm," but there's no interrupting, there's listening, and possibly, at the end, repeating back what they said or using

an opportunity to clarify what is said. And it's a wonderful practice. We do that a lot in our trainings. Mindful steps. So mindful walking could be a practice. And yes, you can do it seated in a chair. You can do it with a cane or a walker or a scooter or wheelchair. For some people, the moving with this mindful walking or the mindful movement is more desirable because the thought of staying still is more than they can bear, so it's a nice way to ease into it.

There's also mindful journaling, where you can write down your thoughts with the pencil not even picking up from the paper, or you could type on the computer, or verbally you could journal. You're not looking to make beautiful sentences or grammatically correct, but it's a way to get your thoughts down and you could pay attention to actually the fingers typing or the pencil touching the paper and the curves as you write. And then there's mindful eating. So I like to play with mindful eating. If you have either a drink with you or some of you might have a snack nearby. I know that we put that in the description, if you have it. If you don't, no worries, because you can pretend you do. So, it might be a glass of water, I've got my lemon water here. Or it could be a little snack, such as a raisin or a grape or whatever you may have that you have a little nibble. And I'm going to use the water as an example.

So first of all, when we're mindful eating, and we could do this for a whole meal by the way, but we're just going to show an example of it, would be to, first, be mindful of what the water is in, the fingers touching the glass, the container. Visually, I see water and a lemon floating in it, and not too much sound, too much sound. And then I'm going to take a sip, but do it mindfully. So I notice that the container is touching my lip, and then I might feel the water as it comes into my mouth. And then swallow and be aware of swallowing. Talk about awe, the fact that we can drink and the water goes down and through us and our body processes what we take in. That certainly is a reason to have awe, or to think of it as miraculous, or fascinating, that sense of awe, as though I've never taken a drink of water before.

And that's the idea, to feel the water on your tongue. So if you have a little snack or whatever it may be, you can keep it in your mouth for a while and feel its texture, its temperature. You can use your tongue to kind of touch it and maybe not swallow it right away. What happens when we practice this while eating is that our taste buds become a little bit more prominent, and we might notice the taste of things more when... it slows us down so we can't gobble our food if we're going to feel the texture and maybe hear the chewing. So next time you have a meal, maybe just for a moment, or a glass of water, whatever you are intaking, try it in and see how it is for you. We will move on.

So, this is "Life is a laboratory." Let's move on. So, why would we do this mindfulness? We've heard it's it's a good thing to do. But, so I love this - mindfulness, we can look at it the opposite way, so if we're not paying attention, then we're most likely not really connected with what's going on in us or around us. And then it's a lot easier for us to have this emotional DIS-regulation, as opposed to being more resilient. We can develop a type of stressor or condition from being disconnected. So I love this "dis." And if you look at "dis-ease," so the idea is with mindfulness we can be more at ease. We can be more attuned to what's going on around us, more connected, and we can feel more at ease or be more at ease.

So "yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, and today is a gift." And that's why we practice this idea of being right here. We can't necessarily take away the stress, but we can change how we respond to it. It's real easy to react, we're good at that. But the response, if we can create that pause, then our response is going to be more effective and create more ease for us and those around us. And my students, they do tell me when they practice this, that they feel, they realize that they are not identified by their pain. They are not their pain. And I think that's

important to realize that we are not our MS. We are not our our my migraine. We are human beings.

So mindfulness is known through the studies, now we know it, it does help improve concentration and focus. If we practice the compassion end of this, we will feel more loving kindness and compassion. It helps us to respond rather than to react, and it can help how we cope with our pain and become more resilient. And we did go over this, this idea that if we're anxious and then we react to the anxiety, it becomes a vicious circle. And if you think about animals back in the time, or a lion reacts, or back in prehistoric, they say our prehistoric brain, that's the one that's going to run, fight, flee, when they're stressed. But we don't in daily life, we often do take on that freeze, flight, want to get out of here, run away fast, or get so frozen we can't move. But if we use the mindfulness, we might be able to respond and not feel like we have to run away and get out of here, because that is a reptilian response. But our brains have been conditioned that way. But the good news is our brains are neural plastic and we can change the way that we respond.

I love, love, love this quote by Viktor Frankl, who was a concentration camp survivor, and he says, "Between stimulus and response, there is a space. And in that space is our power to choose our response. And in that response lies our growth and our freedom." And he said this while he was locked up in a concentration camp, someone who believes that firmly that we can find that pause and that space and that freedom, that creates a sense of awe in me. So we ask ourselves, what is in this space? What are our sensations? What are our thoughts? What are we feeling right now? And we do this so that we can create more of an educated response, if you will. And of course, we need to laugh.

So one of the skills that we can use is S.T.O.P., the acronym, S.T.O.P. It's a real easy one to remember. So if we come back to the breath, it's this skill we can use. Something's happening - rather than running or fleeing, we stop, and then we "T," take a breath, check out what's going on, observe it, take that pause, that pause can make the difference between our next action, we ask questions, then we proceed. So stop, take a breath, observe, proceed. You can use that within your meditations. You notice, perhaps, a recurring thought, and you say to yourself, oh, this is a thought. This is how we would do this in a mindful meditation. Oh, this thought, it keeps coming, it keeps coming, it keeps coming. And then we go, oh, thinking, take a breath, kind of observe what's going on, and then we move on to the next breath or the next action that's called for.

So we know in MS that there is pain. And like we said, it could be stress, it could be the emotional stress. We know that many people experience anxiety and depression. Sensations such as burning or tingling, neuropathy, stabbing pain, spasticity - now I'm naming all those things you just don't even want to think about - back pain, trigeminal neuralgia, injuries from falling, Lhermitte's sign, the MS hug, and fatigue. These are all symptoms that you may have experienced one or another. A note about the fatigue - people say that when they meditate that this decreases the fatigue. It's a way of coping with the fatigue. And there are many people that say in a report that when they do like 20 minutes of a meditation, that it's helping us catch up, perhaps, on a certain amount of sleep, we'll just say half hour to an hour of sleep. And so that is something to take into consideration when you're considering what practice should I do? It could be just the breath awareness and pausing for a minute, a few minutes, 5 minutes, or 20 minutes. And it may just help the fatigue lessen just a little bit, just a little bit to take those pauses throughout your day.

So “pain and mindfulness,” and I love this quote: “How strange to think that great pain may be impermanent...” because that's what we think, that it's permanent, that it's not going to go away. And sometimes that's what happens with chronic pain, acute pain, where we stub our toe, that would be like acute pain. something that sudden. But, chronic pain is over a certain amount of time. And then we think it's like in us and we can't get rid of it. “Something in us all seems to want to carve it in granite,” like it's in stone, “as if only this would do full honor to its terrible significance.” Putting it in stone means it's going to stay. “But even pain is blessed with impermanence. ”

So I, interrupted when I was giving you this quote, but take a moment to really think about a lot of people become, they identify with their pain and they think of themselves as “I am my pain,” “I am pain.” And through mindfulness and through... my students who've gone through the mindfulness based training, one of the realizations is that “I'm not my pain.” They realize they're not their pain. They also have this realization that pain is always changing and it's not permanent. So it's easy for me to tell you this, but as you experiment and play with some of these tools, it might actually become reality for you, and which I hope it does.

So mindfulness is this coping tool and our tendency is to want to push the pain away. Right? I'm in pain. Just get it away. And, this is one of my students, Patty, and she suffers from all kinds of muscular pain and also some TMJ. And, it's easy to want to clench and put your fists together. Now, she's been practicing with me for actually 18 years, and she's realized some of these techniques can help her, and I have her in this picture. This just happened a few weeks ago. She put her hands in prayer position up at her third eye. and you could do this while you're lying down or seated, and it can be very comforting. And she realized when she did this and she practiced her breathing, and this is together with even stretching her leg, she realized that her jaw pain settled down. so it's easy to want to push it away, but we can use these practices to actually cope with it.

And so the idea is rather than running from the pain, mindfulness may ask you to actually be with the pain. And I know that sounds like, wow, I don't really want to be with my pain, but that's going back to “come on pain, let's sit down and let's become friends, let's sit down and have a little chat.” And this can take time. We might titrate this, meaning we might dip our toes into the pain, and then, Oh, that's enough, and get back out of that and take your toes back out of the water. And then we might dip them in again, and then we might take them out and we'll play a little with this with the body scan we're going to do an in just a moment.

So the idea is when we do these practices we realize that everything is changing. It's always changing. The body feels different from one moment to the next, from one day to the next, from one morning to the next. And we can use this practice for that. So let's take a moment and, not a moment, actually, we're going to take some time and do a brief body scan. if you were to take a mindful based stress reduction program, you would... your first homework would be the body scan. And believe it or not, it would be, it could be up to 45 minutes. So the body scan can be relaxing. For many, it is. And some people fall asleep. It's not necessarily the intention. For some people, we actually want them to stay awake. When I took the training, in order to get through the training, we were told in order to become a qualified teacher, we had to stay awake during the body scan. And I have to tell you, it can be very difficult, very challenging. And so, the instruction would be to keep your eyes open, but you get to decide, as the practitioner, what your intention is. And I will not be offended in any way if you do fall asleep.

So with the body scan, you want to find a place to either sit or lie down, maybe on cushions, you might cover yourself with a blanket, you're home this evening, so make yourself comfortable.

Our body scan is going to be abbreviated, but I want to give you an idea what it's like. So finding a comfortable place to just be right here in this moment. Take the time to get comfortable. So, you could be seated in a chair and you could be lying down. And whichever position that you choose, know that it's not good and it's not bad. There are some people that actually practice it standing.

Feel the sensation of whatever your body is touching. So if you're seated, you may feel your hips on the seat or the cushion. You may feel your hands touching a body part like your thighs, or maybe your hands around your belly. If you're lying down, notice which parts of the body are touching down on either your bed or your sofa, or maybe you're lying down on the carpet. Notice your heels touching and the back of your legs. You might feel clothing on your legs. You may feel your head resting against a pillow. Notice what your body is touching and the sensation of this. So feel the sensation of whatever is touching your body, your clothing, your blanket, and whatever is underneath you. And bring your awareness to your feet, your right foot and your left foot. And as you attune to sensations in your feet, breathe in and breathe out. Breathe at your rate, at your pace, as you notice whatever there is to feel. And the bottom of the foot, the inside of the foot, the toes, and the top.

Shifting our awareness to our lower legs. This is the space between our ankles, just below the knee. Feel the sensation in your lower legs. The sensation is neither good nor bad. You might notice thoughts that come in, and if they do, just notice it and come back to feeling sensation and your breath. Awareness of breathing. Maintaining your awareness to your knees. The top of the knees. The back of the knees. As you breathe in and as you breathe out, you can imagine that you're breathing into these body parts as we reach each one.

Let's move to the upper legs. So this is the area right below your hips and above your knees; your thighs, the front of your thighs, the back of your thighs. Feeling, noticing whatever there is that comes into your field of awareness. Thoughts may trickle in and your mind may wander from my words. And that's fine. When you notice that your mind wanders, escort your mind back to this sensation, whatever you're feeling at this moment in your thighs.

Now, as we move through the body, you may decide that you want to spend time in a certain body part. And so that's your choice. You could spend more time in that area. You also could move back to another body part if, let's say, you wanted to dip your toes there and then come back to your thighs. So this is how you make the practice your own. Moving towards our hips, we have a right hip and our left hip, noticing the hips touching the seat or the earth or the cushion, feeling whatever there is to feel in this moment, with this breath, right here in this space, as we are together. Breathing in and breathing out.

Moving towards our abdomen. And your arms may be resting in your lap or down by your sides. Feel the belly. Feel the weight of the belly as you breathe in and out. Riding these waves. Sensation of breathing. Feeling the belly expand on the inhale and soften back on the exhale. Bringing your awareness now to your mid torso, your ribs. And you may feel your shoulder blades either against the earth or touching the back of the chair as you breathe in and out. Ribs may be expanding. Feeling the front of the body, where your heart resides. Feeling the back of the body, where your shoulder blades are. As you breathe in, you feel this expansiveness in your heart, and as you breathe out, there's a softening.

Now, if any judgments come in, notice the judgment. Just notice it and then return to the act of breathing. Knowing you can't do this practice wrong, this is a practice. Moving to our fingers and our hands. Feeling the sensation, you may feel fingers touching each other. Bringing your focus

to your palms and the back of your hands. Your lower arms. Elbows and upper arms. Feel the sensation along your arms from the top of your shoulder down to your fingertips, and from your fingertips up through the elbows to your shoulders. Breathing in and out. Moving your awareness to your neck. The space inside the neck and the circumference. Breathing in and breathing out.

Shifting your awareness to our head, the scalp, the forehead, the area in between our eyebrows, you may feel the air coming in and out through your nostrils, the upper and lower jaw, and your tongue resting. And now bring your awareness to the whole body breathing. You are whole, just as you are. Feeling the whole body from the bottom of your feet up through your leg bones and spine. Through the top of your crown. And then as you exhale, bringing awareness down through your head, your spine and arms, and legs to your feet. Breathing in and breathing out.

And so you may choose to stay in this position for as long as you wish. And if you were lying down or you feel like you were in a restful state and you want to stay that way, please do. You're in your homes. And this evening, if you'd like to come out of it, please do slowly. You might circle your wrists, your ankles, let your head rock side to side. And you may come to seated.

So as we close our practice, a few recommendations for you. When you decide to, when and if you decide to bring mindfulness into your day, which I hope you do, choose a day, choose a time of day that would be best for you. For me, I like the morning. I take my dogs out and I brush my teeth. And then I practice. Some people practice before they even leave the bed. I like early in the day. It seems to affect me throughout the day. You want to find a quiet space where you won't be disturbed. You can set a timer so you don't have to worry about the time. And you can start with whatever feels like it's possible for you, something you can do. You might start with a minute, you might go for a few minutes, you might do three minutes. And then over time you can build it up to 5, 10, and maybe up to 20 at some point. You might choose the practice of mindful eating or journaling or mindful listening. So you choose your practice. I recommend starting with a breath awareness practice.

For some people, the breath is... they'd rather practice on sound, and that's certainly something you could do. You might practice on sight, such as you're on vacation or you have a beautiful surrounding and you use that as your mindfulness of what do I see now in this moment, as you breathe. Sensation is also a wonderful place to start to help us be in our body, be connected with our body, and work through physical pain and emotional pain. We want to remember the beginner's mind, loving kindness, non-judgment and trying to "be" rather than trying to "fix" something. This is a lot, like I said, it's simple in principles and the practice is what we do every day. Remembering there's no good and there's no bad practice. It's not like I had a good meditation today in a bad one the next day. We don't really rate them. You might notice that your mind is wandering more one day, and that's just something to notice over time.

So there are... someone asked in the questions that came in before this webinar about studies, and there are several, as I said, they're escalating. And they do show that when we practice this, that our brain actually changes. They've studied the brains of meditators and found things like the amygdala, which is responsible for that fight-or-flight, actually shrinks and the hippocampus lights up more. We recently had Ruchika Prakash, she specializes in mindfulness research, and if you go to this YouTube link, which I believe you'll have, or you go to the Yoga Moves channel, YouTube channel, Yoga Moves MS YouTube channel, she has a session on the different studies in what we know on the research, and does a really nice summary of it.

And then I listed some studies here that you could take a look at. A few people asked about specific studies related to MS, and so we do have one on pain, there was one on depression and fatigue, and there was one on cognition. And like I said, they're growing all the time. There are different apps that you can go to. I don't think one is better than the other. I happen to use the Insight Timer. And there's no charge for many of these apps. So do not feel that you have to pay for these apps. You could skip around. You might not use them at all. I have never paid for an app. There are so many resources out there that you should not feel that you do. What I like about the Insight Timer is it has a timer and you can, it'll ring a bell for you, and you can choose the sound of the bell that you like, and that way, you know if I have to be somewhere, you can set your timer and not worry about that you need to get somewhere in a specific amount of time, that you need to be done with your meditation, or if you might fall asleep. So there's many, many, many guided meditations out there. You can also go to Yoga Moves MS and we have a library of recordings. And we also have live sessions of meditations on Wednesday mornings. And this is all free to you. So please do come to the live classes. They're all free to you. And the QR code is there for you.

So just so you know who Yoga Moves MS is, we are a nonprofit and we provide adaptive yoga and mindfulness and holistic health and wellness education to the community. And you can find all kinds of information on our web site and on our YouTube channel.

Yahaira Rivera:

I'm going to ask you one more question, Mindy, before our time is up, I know that you talk about mindfulness practices as a coping mechanism, especially for pain and fatigue, so if someone is experiencing pain and fatigue or stress, which practice would you recommend that at least they get started with until they can master the mindfulness strategies?

Mindy Eisenberg:

Okay. So let's stop right there. We never master it. I mean, even John Kabat-Zinn will tell you, he's very humble, none of us are gurus in the mindfulness way. So, I think for pain we know that the body scan can work very well. And there's all different types or durations of body scans, so lying down for 45 minutes may be too much for somebody in pain. So please know that you can move. And there are, there is... we did a short one this evening. So there are like 10 minute body scans. There's 20 minute. That also is a nice one, I think, for fatigue because you can lie down, you can choose your position. And very often what they found is that the symptoms went down from whatever symptoms they were having when they went through the MBSR programs. The symptoms, such as MS symptoms, will decrease. They won't be as intense. I can't promise it, but that is what the studies show.

Yahaira Rivera:

Thank you, Mindy, thank you so much. On behalf of MSAA, we want to thank you once again for teaching our MS community about the fundamentals of mindfulness and for all the hands on opportunities that they had to practice tonight. To our wonderful audience, we wanted to say thank you for participating. Please remember that the program was recorded and will be archived on our MSAA website in the upcoming weeks.

For additional questions or information, please remember that you can also reach out to our helpline, and know that we're always thinking about you. Please take care and don't forget to complete the brief survey. The survey link is in the chat and will appear on your screen

momentarily. On behalf of MSAA, thank you Mindy. Have a beautiful night and we'll see each other next time. Thank you.

Mindy Eisenberg:

Thank you. Namaste everyone, namaste.