

Opinion Article

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Meditation and Mindfulness Components in Successful Addiction Treatment and Prevention

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Opinion

Experimental research asserting the usefulness and value of meditation and mindfulness in treating and preventing various addictions has continued to accumulate over the years. The addictions successfully affected include: mobile phone addiction [1], methamphetamine addiction [2], internet [3], opioid addiction [4], video game addiction [5], sex addiction [6], alcohol addiction [7], smoking [8], and thumb sucking [9], etc. To further maximize and extend the effectiveness of meditation and mindfulness in treating addictive behaviors, we need to consider which of its components are most effectual and why.

Theoretically, addiction as habit formation has a variety of psychological factors that feed into it in addition to the physiological layer that comes with the development of chemical dependency. There are a variety of impulses and motivations which can be satisfied and dissipated through engagement in the addictive behavior. The addictive behavior can and will become conditioned, both classically and operantly, as well as developing a schema or script for being aware of and engaging in these situations and behaviors. To sum this up, addiction is an automatic and schematized pattern of being aware of impulses and motivation which are satisfied and dissipated through conditioned behaviors (also part of the schema or script). This process will additionally be exacerbated through anxiety and stress [10].

One of the more outstanding effects of meditation and mindfulness practice is the deautomatization of the individual in their awareness and behavior. This is accomplished by the practice

of being attentive and fully present. This component in and of itself breaks down the cycle previously described by including an increased awareness of the impulse, presenting an active choice in response to the impulse, impeding deferment to the conditioned addiction behaviors, and allowing for active and aware processing of the situation. Also, to the degree that anxiety and stress come into play, meditation has an incredibly long experimental track record of significantly reducing levels of both of those variables. The relaxation produced by meditation and mindfulness removes the “fuel” that feeds the fire for addiction behaviors. This line of reasoning has been validated through the demonstrated efficacy of a technique called Contingent Informal Meditation [9].

It is also true that when we examine the motivations behind addiction behaviors, that a reasonable theoretical argument can be made for how meditation practices can also meet those needs and satisfy the motivation, so that there is no need to engage in the addiction behavior. For example, in regards especially to drug and alcohol addiction behaviors, a strong motivator is to use the substance to alter the individual’s consciousness. A review of the experimental literature on meditation or personal experience with meditation or mindfulness will convince most individuals of the efficacy of these practices to alter consciousness in a healthy and functional manner and thereby reduce the need to engage in the addiction behaviors. Another major motivation for addiction behaviors is for the purpose of achieving relaxation. It has already been mentioned here that it has been incredibly well established in the experimental literature that meditation and mindfulness

produce significant relaxation and again thereby reducing the need to engage in the addiction behaviors. It is also true that addiction offers a vehicle to use for meeting social and belongingness needs. However it is also the case that the practice of meditation and mindfulness can immerse the practitioner in a supportive environment that enriches their social life while lending an adaptive structure which increases their health and wellness while meeting their needs for social interaction and belongingness.

Lastly, it is not difficult to see the usefulness of the 7 attitudes which are developed through the practice of mindfulness, as listed by [11], and how they would be helpful in both treating and preventing addiction. The 7 attitudes are; non-judging, patience, beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, and letting go. Letting go involves non-attachment to objects and processes which then allows us to be free. This attitude therefore strengthens the individual's perception that they are not defined by the addiction situations and behaviors and with the individual no longer being constrained by those limitations are free to choose more conscious and adaptive responses to their situation. Acceptance is being aware of things as they actually are in the present, or in other words being reality centered. This acknowledgement allows the individual to no longer be trapped and drained by their illusions and delusions, and instead be problem focused in a clear and lucid movement toward wellness rather than addiction. Non-striving is built off of acceptance and allows the individual to yield to, on occasion, their situation and setbacks while still remaining steadfast on the larger picture of their movement toward health and wellness. Trust is being able to be aware of, and have faith in, the basic goodness of their existence and the universe. This gives the individual hope and confidence in their ability to ultimately generate the best outcomes even when those outcomes seem distant and improbable to others. Beginner's mind allows the individual to be aware of everything as if they are being introduced to it for the very first time. This allows for a greater appreciation of life and a "clean slate" in their attempts to choose more functional behaviors over addiction behaviors. Beginner's mind also reinforces other of the 7 attitudes such as trust, acceptance, and patience. Patience is the acceptance that the events of life unfold according to their own schedule independent of our preferences and so each stage of that unfolding can be appreciated for what it is without looking forward to the next. Patience is powerful in allowing the person who experiences addiction to be momentarily satisfied with their current situation and progress. The attitude of non-judging involves being less active in our awareness and more receptive in discerning the situation as it truly is. Non-judging allows us to be less egocentric and have a more clear and precise perception of reality. All of these attitudes reciprocally reinforce each other and aid in the other attitudes' development. As such, they are powerful competencies which aid

the individual in treating and preventing addiction behaviors while increasing health and wellness. They allow the individual the power of choice in changing their situation while still being resilient in the face of whatever their current situation is.

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Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

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