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Mindfulness: An Overview

Have you ever felt overwhelmed at work? Too many tasks and deadlines that keep you on the roll? We all have different ways to relate to stress at work or in school. I invite you to ask yourself –

How many hours each week do you usually spend at work/university or with family, friends, having fun, relax or in self-reflection?

How many hours do you spend texting, tweeting, emailing, posting in social media, browsing the net or apps?

Are you truly present in each moment as life unfolds?

Do you feel deeply fulfilled, joyful and intimately in love with your life?

Multi-tasking, overloaded schedules, and high demands often keep us incredibly busy and stressed. It seems paradoxical to meet both the demands and goals of our work and personal life. To balance our expectations, our career goals as scientists, while also living a deeply fulfilling and happy life can be challenging. Specifically, women suffer from those competing demands. To keep us healthy and in the “green zone” depends how we relate to stress and life as a whole. There has been ample research evidence that mindfulness practices allow us to unplug and be more present - deliberately paying full attention to what is happening around you and within you (in your body, heart and mind) in the present moment (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Mindfulness in a nutshell.

The practices of mindfulness cultivate the ability to become more aware of thoughts, emotions, and actions, and thus, give us the tools to choose wisely and live up to our highest potential. Mindfulness practices, such as meditation, breathing and concentration practices, body scans, yoga, mindful eating or walking, train us to be aware of moment-to-moment experiences in life, at work/study, and in relationship to people and the world (Fig. 2).

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| <p>Things come and go – Big and small. We have a choice how to relate to them.</p> <p>Life is change</p> | <p>Slow down when life is rushing by. Speed up when life gets dull.</p> <p>Flow of life</p> | <p>Don't try to deny or avoid your emotions. Face them. Let them flow through you.</p> <p>Inner world</p> |
| <p>Do one thing at a time instead of living in the past or in the future.</p> <p>Now</p> | <p>Do one thing at a time and be fully present.</p> <p>Monotasking</p> | <p>Enjoy experience; participate in the unfolding of each moment.</p> <p>Just be</p> |
| <p>Turn every task, activity and moment into a mindful moment.</p> <p>Mindfulness</p> | <p>When something triggers and stresses you take a breath and chose a mindful response.</p> <p>No stress</p> | <p>Give yourself permission to take breaks & naps. Unplug. Nourish your mind, body and soul.</p> <p>Rest your mind</p> |
| <p>Be curious, open, receptive and accepting. Whatever comes, comes: Good, bad, & neutral.</p> <p>No judgement</p> | <p>Take time to yourself away from others. And spend time with loved ones, a friend, or pet.</p> <p>Balance</p> | <p>Be still, listen and know. Time to reflect allows to chose wisely.</p> <p>Inner knowing</p> |

Fig. 2. What matters is how we relate moment-to-moment with present awareness to life, work, study, people, and the world.

In the workshop “Connecting Mindfulness and Work-Life Balance”, offered by Women in Science, at the ASA-CSSA-SSSA Meeting, Tampa, FL (2017) we looked more deeply at work-life balance. In this workshop we also practiced mindfulness meditation and shared our experiences.

In times of high expectations and workload some of us try to work harder and faster until exhausted and may even become depressed and burn-out. Some others may feel overwhelmed and literally shut down, procrastinate, and numb out. In both cases, we are less attentive and prone to make mistakes. We feel less satisfied with work/study and life and our performance declines. Mindfulness fosters emotional resilience to keep us in the healthy “green zone”. This “window of tolerance” allows us to attune to our inner self and body and socially engage to make a difference in this world full of challenges.

Evidence-based mindfulness research has shown cognitive, neurological, emotional, somatic, and relational benefits and improved well-being and health. Mindfulness practice of only 5 to 10 minutes each day makes a difference. Importantly, we all have the innate capacity to be mindful. And I mean all - students, professors, scientists, teachers, professional consultants, and many more. To transform agronomy, crop, and soil sciences in the future, we first have to transform ourselves to be present to our moment-to-moment highest potential. Mindfulness meditation practice has changed my work-life balance!

Join the ASA-CSSA-SSSA Mindfulness Specialty Group:

<https://www.agronomy.org/membership/specialty-groups/mindfulness>

<https://www.crops.org/membership/specialty-groups/mindfulness>

<https://www.soils.org/membership/specialty-groups/mindfulness>

BIO

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