

Keeping Steady as Things Change

*We can look around the lane and around the world, and we can see change coming. NPR's report this morning about the looming impact from climate change on food production, and therefore farmers, brought me back to the theme of **Resiliency**. How do we find the strength to meet what comes without being battered, depressed and unclear about how to move forward? This is the frame of Spiritual Wellness. Many of you have anchors that keep you steady, whether it's attending Meeting walking in nature, or saying the Rosary. What serves us in these times are practices, regular habits of dropping in to a place of inner peace, letting the mind and the heart reset. One such practice worth exploring and much in vogue is Mindfulness, a simple but powerful tool, established in the mainstream by among others Dr John Kabat-Zinn at his Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program at UMASS Medical. There are several MBSR practitioners in this area, and I am trying to put together some instruction programs here for residents. In the meantime, and with the holidays coming I thought it a good time to share the following.*

—Rob Olmsted RN

You can practice mindfulness in as little as 15 minutes a day

By Marlynn Wei, MD, JD, Excerpted from Harvard Health Newsletter Archives

In the research conducted by Dr. James E. Stahl and his team of Harvard researchers, study volunteers participated in an 8-week mind-body relaxation program offered through the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital. The program taught a range of mind-body skills.

Dr. Stahl, who is now at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, teaches his own patients mindfulness and meditation skills in his internal medicine practice and encourages people to practice daily. He says that you don't need to enroll in a formal program, or even spend a lot of time practicing — 10 to 15 minutes a day will do. Consistency is the key.

Here is a guide on ways to incorporate mindfulness skills into your daily life:

1. Relax at the end of your day with a 15-minute guided meditation. Keep guided meditations or podcasts on your phone or tablet for easy access. Guided meditations are available through:
 - apps like Headspace or Meditation Oasis
 - the UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center
 - the Chopra Center
 - meditation teachers like Tara Brach
2. Start your day with a basic Sun Salutation yoga sequence.
3. Check in with your breath for 10 to 15 minutes for a midday break. Close your eyes and notice where you store stress in your body. As your breath becomes slower and smoother, imagine sending your breath to that area on your inhalation. Imagine a knot loosening as your exhale. Repeat this cycle with each inhalation and exhalation.

4. Do a body scan in 10 to 15 minutes. Find a comfortable seat or lie down. Close your eyes and breathe more deeply and slowly. First, focus your attention on your feet. Notice any tension, pain, or stress. Take deep, slow breaths as you focus your awareness on that area of your body. As if you are scanning your body with light, move your attention slowly upward. Notice how each section of your body feels as you continue to breathe slowly: your shins and knees, thighs and hips, lower back and abdomen, chest and upper back, neck and shoulders, and finally your head.

Try a variety of approaches to find what sticks. Daily practice works best, but if you have a busy schedule, aim to practice at least three or four times a week. And don't give up if you feel like it's not working on the right away. These techniques are like any other skill or workout — the more you do it, the stronger you will get.