Dakota Wellness Program
June 2017

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Exploring mindfulness

As it grows in popularity, mindfulness might seem like yet another thing to add to the list in our pursuit of wellness. Fortunately, mindfulness doesn’t require much “doing”, but more “being.” And like all health habits, it takes practice.

Is it for me?
Our culture pulls us in all directions, causing us to end up on auto pilot most of our day. Practicing mindfulness lowers stress hormones and helps us be more present. It can be incorporated into our regular activities like walking, working, eating, spending time with others, or even doing the dishes.

Why practice?
Our brain structure changes when we participate in structured activities such as breathing techniques, movement (yoga or tai chi), concentration activities or sitting meditation. These changes improve our performance, attention, mood and health.

Practice also increases awareness of the body, feelings, thoughts and surroundings. If we observe a nagging pain in the neck, followed by a worry or frustration, a pattern is identified. Observing instead of reacting to the sensation forms a new pathway in the brain, breaking the cycle. Try these simple practices to incorporate mindfulness into your day.

Walking: Every time you get up from your desk, notice how your body feels as you start to walk. Bring your focus to the things you see, hear and feel.

Eating: Avoid distractions while eating. Distinguish between hunger and cravings. Cravings usually subside, but hunger does not. Take a few deep breaths, go for a walk or drink some water to curb a craving.

Teamwork: Try putting yourself in someone else’s shoes to connect to your co-workers in a new way. Choose a person you interact with frequently and imagine the successes and struggles they experience each day.

Emailing: Take a few deep breaths while writing and before sending emails. Be sure to look over what you have written.

Breathing: Place one hand on your belly and one on the chest. Take a slow breath through the nose counting to five and allow the belly to come out, lengthen up through the spine and fully expand the chest. Exhale through the nose counting to five, then push the air completely out. Continue for two to five more cycles.

Book Club

How to Train a Wild Elephant & Other Adventures in Mindfulness
by Jan Chozen Bays, MD

Mindfulness has been shown to improve overall well-being by reducing stress, decreasing anxiety and depression, and reducing blood pressure and weight. While it can greatly change your overall quality of life, it does take practice like any other health habit.

Physician and Zen leader, Jan Chozen Bays developed 53 different practices to help you increase mindfulness in your everyday life. Simple mindfulness practices presented in this book include taking a deep breath before answering the phone, mindful eating and looking at things through loving eyes. Each practice includes a short life lesson and tips to help you turn mindful moments into a long lasting habit.

Discussion questions

1. What was your key takeaway from the book?
2. Were you able to try some of the mindfulness exercises?
3. Which mindfulness practice surprised you the most?
4. Have you noticed increased awareness of your body, feelings, thoughts or surroundings?
5. Do you find value in practicing mindfulness?
Give it a try...

Write your future self a letter

Actions that we take in the present have a tremendous impact on our future. If we decide to indulge in that cookie today or skip the gym tonight, this sets us back tomorrow. Try this activity to help create your ideal future, increase self-awareness and give yourself a memory to look back upon.

1. Imagine your future self in exactly one year. What do you want your future self to be like? Think about all areas of life, including your career, community, physical, emotional, financial and social well-being.

2. What goals or dreams do you want to achieve within the next year?

3. Put the letter in an envelope addressed to you. Establish an “open on” date. We suggest opening it 6 to 12 months from the day you write the letter.

Aromatherapy

Essential oils are extracts derived from flowers, herbs and trees and have been used for thousands of years to improve physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. Aromatherapy is the practice of using these essential oils for healing. Our sense of smell is powerful, and the scent of the essential oils is thought to stimulate the brain to improve health.

Inhalation of essential oils is one way that you can utilize essential oils safely. You can inhale essential oils through an inhaler for personal use or via a diffuser for the whole room. When purchasing oils, verify that it is natural, certified or therapeutic grade. Oils found in lotions and beauty products are usually synthetic and will not produce the same results. It is also good to note that essential oils should not be used if you have an allergy to plant extracts or oils, or are currently pregnant or breastfeeding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ESSENTIAL OIL</th>
<th>THERAPEUTIC USE</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lavender</td>
<td>Pain, anxiety, insomnia, stress, grief/loss, depression, nausea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>Pain, anxiety, insomnia, stress, depression, nausea, indigestion, hiccups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peppermint</td>
<td>Pain, nausea, headache, joint pain, focus, fever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergamot</td>
<td>Pain, anxiety, insomnia, stress, depression, nausea, indigestion, hiccups, agitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginger</td>
<td>Pain, nausea, indigestion, motion sickness, fatigue</td>
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</tbody>
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The importance of words

If you want to be part of a great work environment, think about how the words you choose and the conversations you have can help shape it. While gossip may feel good at the moment, it can lead to a lack of trust, hurt feelings and decreased morale. Positive conversations enable us to flourish.

Appreciative inquiry theories can explain how this works. The Constructionist Principle says that our “words create worlds,” so positive conversations and interactions lead to positive outcomes in our social environment. The Simultaneity Principle explains that conversations and interactions become positive the instant we ask a positive question or tell a positive story. This creates an upward spiral.

A general guideline for gossip is that if you wouldn’t say it in front of that person, skip saying it at all. Remember that you can help create a healthy culture by complimenting others to their face, and then bragging about them behind their back.
Disguise your veggies smoothie

Serves: 1
Total Time: 10 min | Prep: 5 min

Ingredients:
1 cup water
½ of a lime, squeezed (about 1 tbsp)
1 cup kale
½ of a kiwi, skin removed
¼ cup of frozen pineapple
3 ice cubes

Directions:
Place all ingredients in a blender and blend for two minutes.

Nutrition Facts:
Calories: 113 | Total Fat: 1 g | Sodium: 36 mg | Total Carbohydrates: 27 g
Dietary Fiber: 3 g | Total Protein: 3 g

Nutrition information computed using nutritiondata.com

Activate!

Wellness Tool
Mindfulness can be challenging when you first start. If you don’t know where to begin or need more ideas on how to incorporate mindfulness into your life, try a wellness tool like the Stop, Breathe & Think: Meditation and Mindfulness app. Check it out in your favorite app store to discover new mindfulness practices that may work for you.

- Help with self-healing, motivation, anxiety, stress, depression and compassion
- Help you track your emotions, mood and favorite mindfulness practices
- Guide you through customized meditation and mindfulness experiences
- Change up your mindfulness routine based on how you are feeling mentally, physical and emotionally

Remember, mindfulness takes practice! After your first time, you may feel immediate changes in your emotional or physical well-being, but it takes regular practice to experience increased health benefits.

Monthly Observances

Fireworks Safety
Great Outdoors
Men’s Health
Migraine and Headache Awareness
3—National Trails Day
4—Cancer Survivors Day
14—World Blood Day
12-18—Men’s Health Week

Find a complete list of observances at healthfinder.gov/NHO

QUICK LINKS
sanfordhealthplan.com/ndpers/dakotawellnessprogram

SET-UP A
mySanfordHealthPlan ONLINE ACCOUNT
sanfordhealthplan.com/memberlogin

CONTACT US AT
NDPERSWellness@sanfordhealthplan.com
(844) 742-0014

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