

5 Reasons Dentists need to know about Mindfulness



By Manuela Soares Rodrigues

Mindful Dentistry Training 2022

WHY Dentists need to learn about Mindfulness?

Here's what I discovered!

The dental office is a great place to work. It is satisfying to help patients improve their health while earning a good living.

However, we all know dentistry can have a relentless pace.

There is another way to be in our hectic clinical everyday life, a way where there is room for enjoyment and reconnecting with why you chose this profession in the first place.

A way to overcome stress and BE HAPPIER!



1. What is Mindfulness

"Paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally." -Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn

Mindfulness is the simple act of paying attention and being present in what we are doing.

When you are actively mindful, you notice your thoughts, emotions, feelings, body sensations, movements, and behaviours.

Our attention is pulled in all directions and we are often distracted. Most people don't even notice when their minds wander from what they are doing to other thoughts and sensations.*

By practicing mindfulness, you are fully involved in the activity with all your senses instead of allowing your mind to wander.

Imagine being present with your patient, attuned to your procedure, relaxed, alert, aware, focused and calm.

In other words, tuned in to the present moment.

*"A human mind is a wandering mind, and a wandering mind is an unhappy mind," -Killingsworth and Gilbert

1. What is Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a learned skill.

Mindfulness allows you to approach clinical challenges with calm, take clear decisive action, and be present to what is actually happening.

Mindfulness invites more enjoyment and peace in your work and life!

"I'm really excited about the effects of mindfulness on my dentistry practice. It's been great to see it move away from being a spiritual thing towards proper science and clinical evidence, as stress is a huge problem and has a huge impact on many dentists' health. Being able to take time out and focus our mind is increasingly important!"

-P.M, Dentist





The science behind mindfulness

Harvard studies* found that mindfulness meditation conclusively and positively changes your brain structure. MRI scans show that after an eight-week course of mindfulness practice, the brain's "fight or flight" center, the amygdala, appears to shrink.

This primal region of the brain, associated with fear and emotion initiates the body's response to stress. As the amygdala shrinks, the pre-frontal cortex – associated with higher order brain functions such as awareness, concentration and decision-making – becomes thicker.

The "functional connectivity" between these regions – i.e. how often they are activated together – also changes. The connection between the amygdala and the rest of the brain gets weaker, while the connections between areas associated with attention and concentration get stronger.

This change also causes us to change the way we react to everything, and enables us to rely more on our executive functioning rather than impulses.

*Dispositional Mindfulness Co-Varies with Smaller Amygdala and Caudate Volumes in Community Adults. Adrienne A. Taren, J. David Creswell, Peter J. Gianaros. Published: May 22, 2013



2. How Mindfulness Works

Mindfulness is a proven and powerful stress relieving tool.

Mindfulness relaxes the body and mind. It helps to lower the heart rate by igniting the parasympathetic system evokes the relaxation response (the opposite of the stress response) and lowers stress hormones like cortisol. It also floods the brain with dopamine and serotonin.

By reducing the stress levels in our body, we sleep better, have more energy, have better focus, attention and memory, less anxiety and improved immune function.

Mindfulness will make you healthier and happier and mindfulness will make you better at your job.

When the body is in "fight or flight" mode, mental capacity decreases. Mindfulness reduces stress and allows you to be more productive and focused.





3. Why is Dentistry Stressful

Stress makes dentists exhausted, sick and unhappy.

In a study nearly 60% of dentists perceive dentistry as highly stressful. Dentists rank the most intense stressors as: 1) running behind schedule, 2) causing pain, 3) heavy workload, 4) late patients and 5) anxious patients. (Moore R, Brødsgaard I, 2001.)

In 20 years of practicing dentistry, I also struggled with perfectionism - both mine and that of difficult and demanding patients.

Dentistry is a minefield of triggers that keep us in "fight-flight" mode by turning on our sympathetic nervous system. It's important to find **a way to decrease the triggers of our sympathetic nervous system and enhance our parasympathetic nervous system.** This helps us activate healthy coping mechanisms which will allow us to make professional and personal choices that will help decrease our stress and increase our wellbeing.

The dental professional who is mindful and self-aware is more likely to engage in activities to better manage stress. This self-awareness also increases self-compassion, reduces stress and leads to less burnout.



4. What Mindfulness is NOT

A quick fix or a miracle cure.

Mindfulness is mental training and dedicated effort.

- **Mindfulness is not (only) meditation.** Mindfulness is not synonymous with meditation. Meditation is just one mindfulness practice.
- **Mindfulness is not about always feeling good.** Mindfulness teaches you to recognize, sit with, and work through your thoughts and feelings – the good, the bad, and all in between.
- **Mindfulness is not complicated.** It's actually straightforward: Mindfulness is mental training and it will improve your life. You don't have to sit in lotus, use "fancy fingers", or chant in a strange language. All you need to do is sit comfortably.
- **Mindfulness is not about stopping thoughts.** We all have monkey minds and thoughts keep coming through our mind. Thoughts are not the enemy. It's about noticing them.
- **Mindfulness is not religious or spiritual.** It's not associated with a particular religious orientation nor does it conflict with any.
- **Mindfulness is not for everybody.** You may determine that mindfulness isn't for you.. That's perfectly OK. It's not the only way to enhance your wellbeing.
- **Mindfulness is not Weird.** What's so weird about sitting and thinking? Besides, CEOs of companies, Olympic athletes, health care takers in hospitals and teachers are doing it, you can, too!



5. Mindfulness at Work

The workplace can be a fast-paced, stressful environment. Is it possible to thrive at work?

Multiple scientific studies regarding mindfulness training in the workplace have presented incredible results.

The benefits include response flexibility, decreased rumination, empathy, affect regulations, increased self-determination and persistence, improved working memory and more accurate affective forecasting (Glomb, Duffy, Bono, & Yang, 2012).

Benefits of mindfulness in the workplace also include improvements in task commitment, work enjoyment and decrease burnout (Hyland et al., 2015).

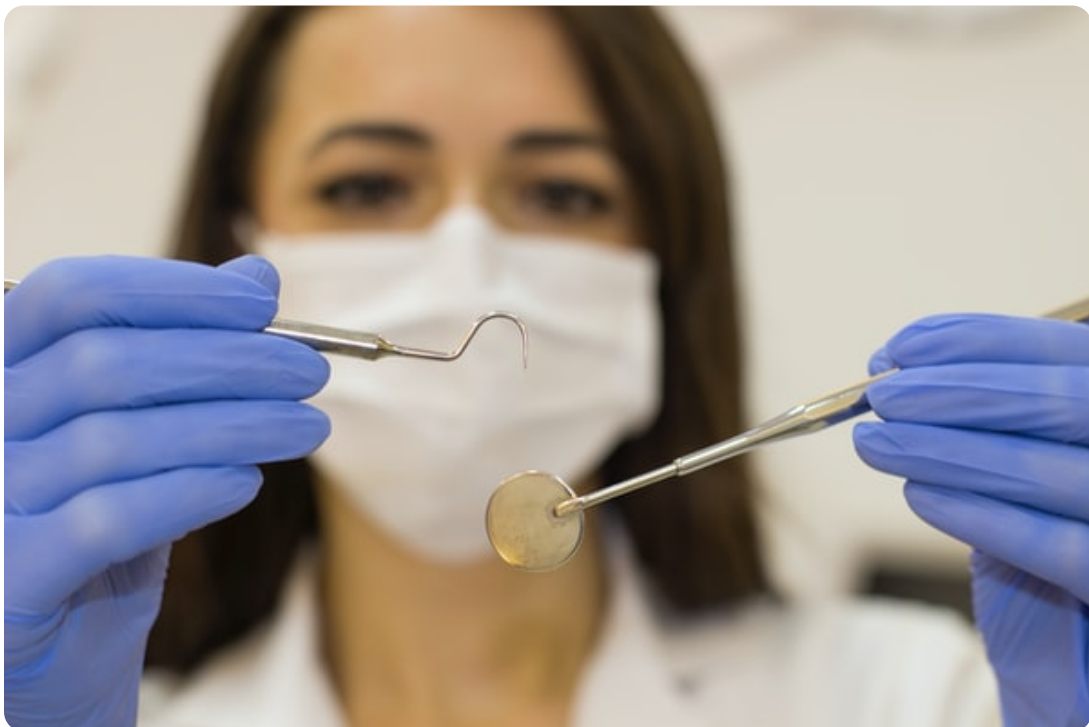
Companies like Google, Apple, Nike, Sony, Facebook, are embracing Mindfulness. The Hospital for Special Surgery in New York, for example, integrates meditation and mindfulness in patient healing programs. When people are aware of their pain with some detachment, they are less afraid. This allows faster healing and more personal power.

□ 5. Mindfulness at Work

It's time for Dentistry to embrace Mindfulness.

The Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction training is a proven option for dentists looking for a safe, reputable, and deep exploration into mindfulness and all its benefits:

- Lower levels of work-related stress and greater job satisfaction.
- Improved attentiveness, active listening, empathy, patience, presence - all important for a good dentist-patient relationships.
- Better treatment planning and decision making.
- Improved response flexibility in any situation.
- Better entrepreneurial skills: improved cognition, energy and emotional stability so that Dentists can maintain flow state and operate consistently at peak performance.





By Manuela Soares Rodrigues

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Qualified Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Teacher.

Passionate about empowering dentists and helping them to manage their stress and to live a happier, more balanced life!

Want to know more about Mindfulness Training for Dentists?

Discover the Most Scientifically Studied, Tested & Proven Mindfulness Training Program to Reduce Stress, Recapture the Joy of Practicing Dentistry, Enhance Your Focus and Productivity, and Be Happier in Practice!

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