

## Less Stress, Better Health

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**VICTORIA**

I think we're getting up and running, here. So please bear with me. This is my very first webinar.

**BRAUN:**

So I want to thank you so much for being here. My name's Victoria, like I said.

Today we're talking about mindfulness. This is something that I have done since I was in my master's program. I studied at Oregon State University. I did several years of meditation research looking at mindfulness, meditation, compassion, and all of these things, and doing some actual hands-on research.

So, this is an area that is near and dear to my heart, and I still get the opportunity to talk about at WSU. And so, that's great.

So we'll just kind of go ahead and get started, here. To start, I think, when we're talking about mindfulness, it's really helpful to take a couple moments, here. And this is a little trippy for me, because I haven't done this to just a computer screen before.

But so, I'd love for you to take a moment, and just, in your own space-- in your own room, here-- I want you to take a full 60 seconds and really just empty your mind of any thoughts that you're experiencing right now.

So we'll go ahead and pause, right there. That wasn't even a full 60 seconds. Usually, when I'm doing this with groups, I get a chance to really see the agony in people's eyes as this clock just kind of drones on. It feels like eternity.

And so, you can feel free to respond in a chat. But I'm interested to know if any of you had the experience that I mentioned, there-- which, really, the only instruction that I offered was clear your mind of any thoughts.

So did anyone actually have that experience of not having any thoughts? And I pull up the chat window to see what you all are saying, but I have a pretty good idea, if you are like most people, that was not your immediate experience.

So when we're kind of going through here today, I'm really excited to share with you a little bit about what we know when we are looking at what the brain is doing when we don't give it anything to do. And that's kind of what I just tasked you with, right here, was don't think about

anything.

And, in fact, that cue tends to make people's brains more active. So we tend to think more-- get more distracted. We're filing through the to-do list. We're thinking about all of the other things that are going on. What is that sound? What is going on over here?

And so, what we're finding, more and more, when we're looking at people's brain, when we are scanning them and in giving them nothing to do, we actually find that people's brains are more active when they're not thinking about anything, or they're supposed to not be thinking about anything, than when we're actually focusing on something.

And so, if you are like most people, your brain probably defaulted to one of four places. And so, in neuroscience, we're calling these the default states. And there's about four main places that people's brains tend to go to when they're told don't do anything-- don't think about anything.

And so, these default states, we're going to go through pretty in-depth here. So these are going to be called commentary, time travel, self-referential processing, and social cognition. So these might sound a little vague, here, but I think you'll definitely relate to some of these as we go through them.

So our very first one. This is the first place the brain might go to when you are not giving anything to do-- you're not giving it a task. So maybe, that experience for you is, you know how our brains kind of shut off when we're doing the dishes, or there's [INAUDIBLE], or we're trying to go to sleep at night? And suddenly, when your brain doesn't have a task, all of a sudden, it starts running on high, here.

So one of the places that it might go to is commentary. And this is really the brain's tendency to have this running narration of everything that's going on in your environment. Right? So maybe you experienced that when you were looking at that picture of the clouds, there. Suddenly you're like, oh, what is that smell? It's cold in here. What's that sound? Why am I doing this? I'm tired. I didn't get enough sleep last night. I had too much caffeine, on and on.

So commentary is this constant running narrative of what's going on in your environment. Generally, especially in more Western cultures-- you might be able to relate to this, but-- our commentaries tend to be pretty negative. I don't know if your commentary is like this. I'd love to meet you if it is.

But if it's positive-- like everything's great, I'm so happy, the weather is cold, and I love that. Right? Like, if your commentary is constantly positive, that is excellent. I'm really happy for you. Most of us don't have that experience.

For the second place that the brain tends to go off to when it's not given any stimuli to process and play with, is time travel. This is what a lot of us relate to.

This can be traveling back to past memories, reliving the glory days. Or maybe this is thinking about what you're going to do with all of your lottery winnings.

And so, we see these default states occurring, and showing up in brain scans. And what this will look like, here, for time travel, is when we give someone nothing to do on an fMRI machine. All of a sudden, areas associated with memories like the hippocampus start lighting up and activating. So we're going through old memories. Or maybe that future planning place starts acting up in the prefrontal cortex.

Interestingly, we'll actually see both of those places activating at the same time. And really, what that tends to be is, we're thinking about our old memories, and then we're thinking about how to redo them. And usually, what this looks like, for me, is me thinking about an old argument that I'm still upset about. And then I'm, like, re-hashing it, reliving it-- and next time I'll say these things.

And so, a lot of us tend to do that, too. We get stuck in the old arguments, or more negative things, and then re-envisioning how we'd do it. So we're activating places in the brain responsible for memories and future planning.

So that's time travel. Our third one is self-referential processing. It sounds like a big, complicated thing. It's just thinking about yourself. We love to think of ourselves, especially in Western cultures. This is a place that your mind might default to when you're thinking about your strengths, or your skills, your faults, your qualities.

It's the kind of commentary in your mind where you would be going through, I'm the kind of person who likes these things. I really love skiing. I don't like winter. I'm a great friend, or I'm really bad at x, y, and z. What you're doing is you're just separating yourself, and you're strengthening your concept of who you are by thinking about ways that you are different and unique.

And our final one is called social cognition. We do this all the time in the context of groups and social relationships. We're thinking about other people. We're thinking about how we fit into groups. We're thinking about what other people think about us. We're thinking about what they think we think they think.

It goes on, and on, and on. We really have these complex thoughts about people and groups, and how you fit in or you don't. And so, these are our main four default states.

So I am interested in seeing, here-- and due to our technical difficulties, I don't really have the ability to look at our polling. So maybe this is just something that you think to yourself. But I'd love to know if you relate to these default states.

Is there a specific one that, maybe, you spend the most time in? So do you catch yourself with this running commentary, or maybe you time travel a lot? Is there one that you really relate to, here?

So regardless, these are the four main places that your brain will go to. We'll, go ahead and skip this one, real quick, here.

So I want to revisit these. Why does the brain go to these spots? This is really deeply wired in us, and why is that?

Well, it turns out that all of these default states are actually really important mechanisms in our brain for survival. It's important, when we think about our ancestors-- way way, way, way, way back when, those people who were hunting and gathering-- their survival was at stake far more than our cushy lives, here in 2017. Right?

And so, all of these states are actually really important when you think about them in the context of our ancestors. So for example, it's important to have a running commentary. You need to be aware of your environment. Is that a fire? What's that on the ground? What's going on over here? You need to be pretty hyper-aware of your environment so you're aware of your safety.

You know, oh my gosh, that looks like a tiger, over there? Right? I should run. It's important that you're active, and your brain is thinking about these things as well, as far as survival mechanisms go.

Time travel. If you think about our ancestors as well, it's important that we tend to learn from

our past experiences and our failures. And it's important if we know that that was a bad place to gather berries, or something. Then we're not going to go there anymore. We're going to reflect on that experience, and know that, OK, that didn't work, this did, and then thinking about what am I going to do tomorrow? How am I going to get food? How am I going to sustain myself, and what have you.

So this one was important, too. We have self-referential processing, and really knowing your strengths-- knowing what you're good at, knowing what you bring to a group. I'm a really great gatherer, but I'm also terrible at hunting. This is what I bring to the group. And strengthening that is important, again, for our survival, historically.

And then, social cognition. We are social creatures. Historically, we lived in tribes. And it's important to know, and reflect, and think about how you fit into the tribe-- what other people think of you. Because of you're doing something that's really pissing people off, you need some amount of awareness to go, oh, maybe I shouldn't do that-- they might kick me out of the group. And we need that group dynamic for survival.

So these default states are hardwired into the brain. And these are really common, and they're important for our survival.

But it is 2017. We are not hunting and gathering. We've got the internet. We've got iPads, and like, Wal-mart, and what have you. It's not like our survival is at stake in the same way that it was when we were hunter-gatherers, and what have you. So we still have these default states. And we tend to be in them way too much.

What we're finding, more and more, is that, when we look at people-- at how much time they spend in default states-- individuals who spend more time in default states tend to be less happy. They tend to be less satisfied with their lives, they tend to have less satisfaction in their social relationships, and a litany of other negative effects from spending too much time in the default states.

Now, they play a role. They're important to us still. But the more time you spend in them, the more unhappy, and generally less pleasant, you tend to find many elements of your life.

So we'll go back here, real quick, one more time. This makes a lot of sense. Right? Our commentaries, like we said before, they tend to be pretty negative. If you are spending time, every day, just listing all of the things you hate about your environment-- how tired you are--

that is going to make the way that you see the world pretty negative. Right?

And in fact, when we look at individuals who experience depression-- individuals who experience mental illness, in general-- tend to spend more time in default states than individuals who do not have any kind of mental health disorder. So individuals who experience depression tend to actually spend the most time in this specific default state. You get stuck in that constant commentary of what's bad, what's going on in the environment, this is hard.

And that kind of begets more negative feelings, which begets more negative commentary. And you can really see how you get sucked into that cycle. So commentary doesn't actually end up being very good for us.

Time travel. A lot of the memories that we go back and visit don't tend to be our favorite memories. Many of us get stuck rehashing old arguments that you had, a fight you had with your partner. Oh boy, maybe you can relate to that experience of trying to fall asleep at night, and suddenly an embarrassing memory you had 10 years ago comes back up. And you're cringing at yourself, and you're mad at yourself. And we tend to get really worked up.

So we find, here, with time travel, even when it relates to future planning, that people who spend less time in the present moment, and more time thinking about the past, or spending too much time thinking about the future, tend to be less happy.

Self-referential processing. It is important to know who you are, and what you're good at. We also find that individuals that spend a lot of time here, thinking about how they are different, tend to be less happy.

But overall, it's been shown in many, many studies-- not just specifically pertaining to default states, but in other contexts as well-- it is actually better for us to think about how we are all the same, to think about ways that we can connect with other people. Not thinking about how you are so different, you are so unique, and such a snowflake, but instead, thinking about, here's how I bridge that gap to someone. Here's how we are the same. Here's how I can empathize with this person. And that actually ends up fostering more feelings of positivity, more satisfaction with life and your relationships.

So self-referential processing, again, it's got a place. It's important. But when we spend too much time here, that's when we start to see more unhappiness.

And finally, social cognition. We can definitely all think of times when we've spent too much

time thinking about what other people think of us. We've all been teenagers before. I think that's just your adolescence, in general-- it's like you're just stuck in social cognition.

So we know how that can definitely go wrong, Where you think too much about what other people think of you. And while it's important to know and think about social relationships,

We actually find that individuals that experience high social anxiety-- so being around other people is really stressful for you, and that may impact your life and well-being-- social anxiety is related, most commonly, to this default state. Someone who's experiencing a lot of social anxiety is stuck in social cognition, and they can't get out.

So default states tend to have a lot of negative effects. They've got a place. But, in general, we'll see that individuals who spend more time in default states have higher levels of fatigue, lower immune and hormone regulation, higher levels of weight gain-- and specifically, where you gain your weight, because this is related to stress. And so, individuals that spend a lot of time in default states with high stress levels, high cortisol, tend to gain weight around the midsection more, specifically.

Psychologically, we see higher irritability, stress, anxiety depression, like I was saying before. And behaviorally, we see more interpersonal strain, decreased productivity, and more burn out.

And a lot of these make sense. What you're doing, when you're in a default state, is you're not presently and actively engaging with your environment, right now.

So one last thing I'll say about these, and why they're so important in how we're seeing them as we pursue the neuroscience behind them. Like I said, depression tends to be most highly associated with commentary, social anxiety with social cognition.

In general, individuals with mental illness tend to spend more time in default states. And it's not just that, but they also have a harder time pulling themselves out of a default state and coming back to the present moment.

And so, we can think about this in terms of, if you, or someone you know, has experienced depression or anxiety, it is so much more challenging to actually pull yourself out of that default state, and refocus on your task-- to get to work, to do what you need to do, to have a conversation with someone, and not be stuck in those default states.

So overall, there's a place, but they can be harmful. And so, what is the antidote for this? This is mindfulness.

Mindfulness, in general, is a really hot topic right now. I'm sure you've seen all the BuzzFeed articles on it, and all the Huffington Post, and what have you. It's all over psychology. It's very hot right now. So I think it might be helpful to get us all on the same page of what exactly this definition of mindfulness is.

So we'll consider this paying attention, in a very specific way, non-judgmentally, to one's experience of the present moment. I think the best comment that I've ever found, that kind of encompasses what mindfulness is, is this one.

So often, we are doing things and we're not actually present. Right? We could be walking the dog. But we could also be spending time with our kids, even trying to read, trying to study, exercise. All through our lives, we are busy writing out our to-do list. What do I have to do next? What else is going on here? What does that person next to me thinking? On and on, and on. It's so hard to calm the chatter and just be present.

So mindfulness is kind of the antidote to default states. It's what we practice to help us spend less time in the default states. And it's what we practice to improve many different facets of our lives.

The benefits of mindfulness. There are so many studies on mindfulness that talk about all of the benefits that we see from it. This is the teeniest tip of the iceberg. There are thousands of studies out there that have shown all of the incredible benefits of practicing mindfulness regularly-- so regularly just practicing being present in the moment.

We'll see things like memory, focus. This is kind of recall. So we see improvement in test scores, overall cognitive capacity, metacognitive ability-- so your ability to recognize and think about what you're thinking about improves.

We see satisfaction. And really, what that means is satisfaction with your own life, with your relationships, and with yourself-- overall feelings of satisfaction with yourself. Emotion regulation, the work-life balance.

You'll see at the bottom, we actually see a huge amount of physiological impacts from regularly practicing mindfulness. In general, people tend to get sick less often. This was

something that I found in my research. Regardless of the time of year-- you know, it's winter, it's finals week-- the participants in my study that we were doing mindfulness practices were, in general, getting healthier, regardless of the time of year.

Muscle repair, muscle soreness, recovery. All of these things have been shown to be impacted and improved by mindfulness.

Additionally, practicing this somewhat frequently has been found to decrease rumination, which is kind of that thinking about that embarrassing moment that happened 10 years ago, and you just get stuck in that cycle. Right? You can't stop thinking about it.

Or that argument you had with your partner, you're just stuck in it. You're thinking about it over, and over, and over, and you can't shake it. That would be rumination. And so, we see a real ability for people to kind of stop that rumination cycle, and bring themselves back to the present moment.

Social anxiety, depressive symptoms-- huge decreases in both. Any kind of anxiety and depression, decreased stress, decreased weight gain-- all of these things. And again, like I said, there are so many benefits from practicing just being present.

But it's also important to recognize something I found when I was doing my graduate research on this, is that there is quite a bit of miscommunication, and people thinking that mindfulness is many things. So it's important to just kind of distinguish between some of these things.

So when I say mindfulness, I don't just mean a Zen Buddhist meditation. You're away from the world, meditating on some mountain for three months. That is not what this always is.

So there is state mindfulness where you are doing something in a state. You are doing something mindfully. Right? So for example, you were walking your dog mindfully. You are exercising mindfully. You were playing with your kiddo mindfully.

Then there could be a mindfulness meditation. And this will be a practice where you are sitting and intentionally cultivating a state of mindfulness. And that would be maybe a sitting practice. There's a couple ways to do that. But that would be a mindfulness meditation.

So we're going to expand on both of those first two-- state, and then a meditation-- so you can apply those in your own life and start seeing some of these benefits almost immediately. But then, the third one, just be aware of, is that mindfulness can also be a trait-- like a personality

trait. And I really liken it to, maybe, conscientiousness. Right? Where you're very mindfully and aware as you move through the world.

So I practice mindfulness frequently, and I am just not a mindful person by trait. I'm usually spilling stuff and tripping. I'm just not aware of my environment. I am a tornado of a person.

So we all differ on how mindful you are as a personality trait. And that can be impacted by practicing mindfulness. But we're really not going to talk much about that. It's just important to understand that there's a couple different ways that you can be mindful.

So we'll go through a state mindfulness. And really, when I think of that, like I said, there's many ways to practice state mindfulness. One is going to be this mini doses of mindfulness. And these are ways that you can do this every single day. It takes less than five seconds. And you'll be practicing mindfulness, and cultivating an ability, and you'll start seeing these benefits the more you practice it.

So we'll talk about what we call mini doses of mindfulness. But a couple of ways that I can think of would be, if you're studying for a class, I want you to think about what you actually do when you're studying.

So yeah, you've got your textbook, and you've got Blackboard up, and maybe a couple sites. What else are you doing?

Realistically, you're probably checking your phone, you're probably looking at other websites. You're taking Facebook breaks every 15 minutes. You are getting distracted. You're getting up and making a cup of tea. You're grabbing more snacks. You're procrastinating. You're finding anything you can do to distract yourself. You've got music blaring. And maybe your partner's talking to you.

We love to think that we can multitask. If we were mindfully studying, we would try to eliminate as much as we can, and solo task.

Another way to think of this could be exercising. If you've got an exercise practice-- let's say jogging-- that you do, and you wanted to be more mindful, and get more benefits from, your jogging practice, you would actually-- I know, hear me out-- you would actually take the headphones out and just focus on the breath-- just focus on your muscles screaming at you, and how much pain you're in.

And that would be mindfully exercising. So it's hard to mindfully exercise if you're trying to distract yourself in every way possible. So I'm not saying you have to mindfully exercise, but you absolutely can.

Think about all the things that you do while you're eating. If you wanted to take on a mindful eating practice, put down the phone, put down the book. Maybe put your fork down in between each bite, and just experience the food as you're eating it. Just be present in the moment, and just being aware of that-- how your body feels, what your breath is doing.

So those are a couple examples of how to do certain things in a state of mindfulness. But the best way, I think, to really ease your toes into the water of this, and really start incorporating this into your day, is through these mini, little baby doses of mindfulness.

So I think this woman may be biting her steering wheel. But generally, we can all relate to the feeling of being in traffic, and just being a rage-filled monster version of ourselves. Right? We know that experience.

You know, I moved here from Southern California, and I still get angry. I live in Pullman, Washington now. I still find myself just being a ridiculous person in traffic-- just super angry and irritated, and what have you.

So if traffic is not what gets you all worked up, I want you to think about something that really gets you worked up, and angry, or whatever it is. That just, ugh, you get so frustrated that you bite your steering wheel, or whatever. Right?

So thinking about that time-- we'll go with our traffic example here-- the way that I try to do my little mini doses of mindfulness is I try to catch myself when I'm in that moment of rage, when I'm in that moment of steering wheel, ugh, you cut me off, you're such a horrible driver, and so forth. Right?

So I try to catch myself. I just want to notice that I'm OK. All right. Whoa, whoa. I'm having a pretty high emotion here. Right? I want to start noticing when I'm having those high emotions.

Then we do three things. It is very simple. All I'm doing is I want to acknowledge and label it. So I'm sitting [AUDIO OUT] minute, in Pullman. I'd had to wait at this signal for five minutes, and that's just very upsetting to me. And I'm getting really worked up. Fine.

So I catch myself having that kind of high emotion, there, and I go, OK. All right. Whoa, whoa,

fella. I'm saying this in my head, fella, all right. OK. It seems that I'm having a lot of agitation, and I'm really irritable.

So this step says label this emotion, and this is key. This is really important. A lot of us tend to be dragged around by our feelings. And we don't recognize, until later, that we were really anxious, and that's why we were acting that way. Right?

So I try to catch myself. When I'm having a high emotion, I label it. I go, OK Victoria, you're really irritable right now. Right? I try to label it. It can just be as simple as, this is frustration. This is irritability. This is whatever. Label it. Right?

Let yourself experience that emotion. Just give yourself one second, one teeny, tiny little second. And just say, OK, that's fine. Right?

So when I'm in traffic, maybe I'm running late to work or something. Right? And I don't like being late for things. That makes me anxious. It makes me more irritable.

So let's say, I'm in the car, I'm frustrated. I'm going to notice it. And I'll just go, OK. This is anxiety. I'm going to let myself have that, because that's a normal human emotion. When we became human, people, we said, we are going to sign up for a whole range of human emotions. You can't get mad at yourself for having a feeling. They're going to happen. That's OK.

So I just let myself have it. I usually say, you know what? That's understandable. You're running late. You know like that feeling. This is frustrating. That's OK. So I let myself have it for one second, and then I move on with that knowledge.

So what does that mean? That could mean anything. Right? So I like to let myself have that feeling for just a second, because a lot of us also spend time just repressing. Every time we're having hard feelings, we try to push them away, or not have them. Just let yourself have it.

And then, that step three is moving on with that. So maybe, you go right back to screaming expletives at the car in front of you. Or maybe, you recognize that you're not actually as upset as you thought you were, or maybe you calm down.

So maybe you go right back into having that feeling, or maybe you move forward that knowledge and recognize that, OK, maybe I can calm down here. Right? It kind of depends, situation to situation.

The other piece with this, I think, that is really beneficial is syncing this three-step process to your breath. So the next time you're having a really high emotion, whatever that is-- frustration, anger, maybe you're real sad, whatever, you're having a really extreme emotion-- just recognize it, and as you breathe in, take a really intentional breath in. Breathe in, label the emotion on that in breath.

So I'm inhaling, and I'm saying, OK, this is frustration. I am frustrated. As I hold that breath-- so I inhale, step one. And then I hold that breath, and I say, all right. That's OK. People have feelings. You're a person having a feeling. That's OK.

I hold that breath at the top, just for one second, and as I exhale, I'm moving on with that knowledge. So maybe I go right back into it, and I'm just as frustrated as before, and I'm whatever-- whatever that experience is.

But generally speaking, if you can take one to three seconds to do this tiny, mini dose of mindfulness, you're moving on with that knowledge-- especially the more you practice this-- it doesn't look like you going straight back into that emotion. But really, you end up kind of calming down and recognizing that maybe that's not quite as frustrating, or maybe you can calm down about this. It creates space between your emotion and then your reaction to it.

So I'm hoping that kind of make sense. And because I don't have dual screens, here, I can't see if anyone has any questions at this moment. But we definitely have a lot of time at the end, here, for questions.

But these mini doses of mindfulness, you will notice, the more you practice doing this-- catching yourself at high emotions, labeling it, and breathing, just inhale, label, let yourself have it, exhale move on with your life. The more you practice this, the more you'll notice the emotions. The more you notice, the more you'll practice.

And the more you'll do this, this capacity grows hugely, And. Pretty quickly, too. The more you do this, the more you'll start to recognize yourself creating a little space between your emotions and your reaction to them, and letting yourself not get so caught up in the feelings of your emotions that you're losing track of your world and your environment. But instead, you just kind of bring yourself back to your experience of the present moment.

And it is phenomenal. I promise, if you try this for two, three, four weeks, you will notice a change in the way you think about many things.

Incidentally, if you do end up practicing this, trying it, seeing it, and feeling if it works, I always encourage you to email me. Let me know. I love hearing about this. But I promise, you will notice a difference in the way that you respond to things pretty quickly. Oops.

So we'll move forward. So those were some examples of ways that we can bring about more of a state of mindfulness to our lives. But the most robust way to get benefits from a mindfulness practice is actually through a meditation.

So sometimes, this just doesn't sit well with people, and I totally get it. You don't have to do it. However, you will notice that if you do a brief meditation practice, if you try to do this, you'll notice the effects of mindfulness even more quickly in your life.

So the first thing to recognize with meditation, like he said, we can do this anywhere, anytime. You don't need to have a meditation room with a meditation cushion, and incense, and all of that.

Truly, the first steps to practicing meditation are just becoming aware of your breath. So that's what I talk about what those mini doses of mindfulness-- to use your breath. Inhale, label, acknowledge, exhale, release it and move on.

So that's one way to cultivate and use the breath here. Another way to practice meditation, at any given moment, is to just be aware of your breathing. So feel what it feels like as it's entering in through your nose. Feel where it goes into your body. Notice how it feels different when you're exhaling. And just relaxing into that. Just doing that for one, two, three seconds, is an incredible start.

So a mindfulness meditation, a lot of people think you need to sit down for an hour and do this, and I promise you that will only cause you much pain, and much frustration. So the best way to start is just focusing on the breath, and letting your brain, it's OK. It is going to wander away. Your brain will go right back to chattering. Your brain is going to go to a default state immediately.

So the more you practice this, the more you will grow the ability. But in general, you are not trying to empty your brain of thoughts. And I think that's the biggest thing that we do when we're talking about medication. The biggest myth we try to bust is people say, I can't meditate. I hate it. All my brain does is think. I'm horrible at it.

And I go, no, no, no. The brain is going to think thoughts. Like we talked about, we are hardwired to immediately default to the thoughts. We are going to think that's good. We need that. We're going to have feelings. Good, we need that.

What you're doing is you're just practicing bringing your attention to the breath. And that's the perfect way to kind of anchor you to the present moment.

If you start meditating, if you start practicing this, if you have one second of focus on the breath, that is an accomplishment. Expert meditators, they get distracted. The Dalai Lama has rough meditation days where he can only focus for five, 10 seconds. That is OK. Don't expect perfection here.

So this resource, over here, is called Calm. We're going to visit that website, and I'll show you what it looks like in a bit. But that is an excellent way for you to practice meditation. And they do a guided meditation, so they keep her brain here.

I don't know what this is. But here we go. OK.

So some basic tips. If you want to start a small meditation practice, really, I mean it, start small. I would highly recommend using the Calm.com resource that I'll show you in a bit, because a woman with an extremely calm voice will walk you through meditation.

But I would start small. And what I mean by that is frequency is actually more important than how long you are meditating.

So we see this both in the Eastern tradition-- eastern wisdom tradition texts. When they've been talking about meditation for 2000 years, Western psychology just happens to have jumped on this bandwagon in the last 30, 50 or so. But we see this both in our psychological research and what the wisdom traditions have been saying for thousands of years, is that it's more important to practice this frequently than it is to do it for 20 minutes once a week.

So that means that you can try to sit and just try to focus on the breath for two minutes, three times a week, and you'll get more benefit than doing one monster 20-minute session, hating it, getting really frustrated, and never trying again. Right?

So start really small-- one minute, two minutes, five breaths. Just focus on five breaths, and that will be your practice. But try to do it frequently. So three times a week, the more you can do it-- maybe that's just practicing a little mini dose of mindfulness every day-- the more you

will see your ability grow quickly here.

So create an environment. I have this on here specifically for meditation practices-- less so about the many doses of mindfulness, or just the one, two, three breaths. Right?

If you want to really start a practice, which I highly encourage you at least try, create an environment. Ideally, you want to have somewhere that's quieter, if you've got a room you could go to. I know folks that will go into a closet because it is the only place that they can go to get away from their dogs, and their kids, and their partner, and the noises.

If you can create a quiet environment, that will be best for you. But don't let not having the perfect place for this stop you from trying. Right? It's never going to be perfect. There's always going to be distractions. There is always going to be sounds. It's more about just trying each time.

So don't let that stop you. Another suggestion I'd have, too. That if you want to really pick this up as a habit and a behavior to start getting some of these benefits-- to improve your health and overall well-being-- incorporate this into some part of your routine.

Now, I will say, mornings have been found to be one of the better times for a lot of folks to meditate, because your brain isn't chattering quite as loud as it will be at night. But some people really enjoy doing this at night.

So if you can incorporate this, you take one minute, every morning. You have one minute to spare. I know you do. You take a one minute. You sit down at your coffee table. You've got your cup of tea in front of you. You close your eyes. You set a timer, and you just focus on the sensation of breath for one minute, that is an incredible way to incorporate that into your routine.

And what we know, we know when creating a habit, it's best to make it really, really, really easy. If you try to start a new habit where you're like, I'm going to meditate for 40 minutes a day, seven days a week, for the rest of my life, that's my goal-- just like New Year's resolutions-- in three weeks, you will give up on that habit, like most of us.

So try to make this as easy as possible, and then start growing this ability and maybe work up to a little bit. You know, OK, I'm going to do five minutes three times a week. OK. Now I'm going to do five minutes four times a week. Right? Grow this very, very slowly.

I don't know if you can relate to this, but this is the squirrel brain. This is the monkey brain that we're talking about.

You will notice that you will sit down, set a timer for one stinking minute, and immediately your brain is going, squirrel! That is OK. Be kind to yourself.

I think the second biggest thing that I end up talking people through when they're trying to start a meditation or basic mindfulness practice is that they get really mad at themselves when they don't do it right.

First of all, there is no right. Yeah? But second of all, the brain is going to do the squirrel brain, the monkey brain, that's what it wants to do. So getting mad at yourself for not meditating right is kind of counterproductive.

So if you're trying to meditate, and you are sitting there, and, oh, you've been thinking about your to-do list for the last 10 minutes, whoops. It's not helpful to be like, ugh, stupid Victoria, you're thinking about your to-do list, you're the worst meditator ever. I'm so mad at you.

A lot of our internal commentators tend to be pretty mean. We don't tend to be very nice to ourselves. So really, if you notice that you are distracted, and you're no longer focusing on the breath-- which you will, frequently-- don't being mean to yourself. Don't be mad at yourself.

The practice isn't having no thoughts. The practice is just recognizing that you've become distracted and bringing your attention back. That bringing your attention back, that's the muscle that we're flexing. That's the muscle that we want to work.

We're never going to eliminate thoughts. We're never going to eliminate that tendency to start going through your to-do list later, to start thinking about everything else. All you're practicing doing is recognizing that you got distracted.

I'm really hoping that makes sense. But just getting mad at yourself, and you're like, ugh, you're meditating wrong, and I'm so dumb, I'm so bad at this-- so common, totally counterproductive.

And this all ebbs and flows, too. It's kind of like if you ever took up a jogging practice. There's good days and there's bad days. There's days when you, whoops, had too much caffeine and you can't turn it off. It can be really frustrating, and that's OK.

Just catch yourself. If you're certain to be a little bit, ugh, I'm doing this all wrong, if you're getting that kind of mindset, just breathe. It's OK. The brain is doing what it was trained to do. Congrats. You're a healthy individual.

So some big takeaways here. Mindfulness, remember, is just being aware of your present moment experiences, without judgement. And that's so important.

That's where that last piece goes. Getting mad at yourself for having feelings, getting mad at yourself for being angry, is just so counterproductive. Just recognize that feelings are a normal human thing. They're good for you. It's OK to have feelings.

So when we have that judgment piece involved, we're kind of detracting from the ultimate goal of mindfulness, which is just being aware-- to just bring your attention back to the present moment, over, and over, and over.

And our goal here, really, is to try to regularly practice creating space between your emotions and then your reactions to them. So the more we cultivate mindfulness, either with a sitting practice, or some kind of meditation practice, or using those little mini doses, each time you do that, you're training your brain to come back to the present moment, and to kind of shake off that cloud of emotions-- of frustration, or anger, or sleepiness-- and just come back, focus on the breath, always using the breath, here, as this constant focal point for your attention. You always have the breath here. And think it is a really helpful tool.

So now I'm going to show you, real quickly, here, this Calm.com that I was talking about. So I'm hoping you can all still see my screen.

So this is Calm.com-- C-A-L-M dot com. You can get an account here, but they've got plenty of stuff for free. What you can do, as we'll see over here, there's all of these beautiful, serene background pictures. I think this is the one we all need, especially over here, in Pullman, in this unending winter.

We can turn on some volume, here. You can hear the nice waves in the background. It's wonderful.

So Calm is a site that will give you guided meditations. This is an app that you can download on your phone that I highly recommend. But what we'll do is we'll go begin.

So this is excellent. So there are daily meditations. The little lock symbol means that you need

to have an account in order to do it. But they have tons that are open for free.

So what we'll do, you can see there's un-guided meditation. And you could set a timer for, let's say, one minute. And you just sit silently. Then a bell rings at the end, and you're done. Or you could go all the way up to like 30 minutes, infinity. Right?

But there's some other really great ones here. And because we started late, I think we have a couple minutes. So I would love to do a real basic one, here.

Also, there are these sleep stories and sleeping meditations that are incredible. But all of these ones are different guided meditations. So this is another way to meditate, where you're focusing on the breath, and one of the guides will actually walk you through something great, here.

So I think, unless anyone comes and bursts in, I think it would be really great for us to do a Calm meditation together. I wish I had y'all in a room so I could do this. But we'll begin.

**CALM.COM:**

Start by finding a comfortable spot you can settle in and relax, and great for posture. Close your eyes. Settle in this moment.

Follow the natural breath as it flows in and out of your body. And for the next few silent minutes, keep your mind concentrated on the rhythm of the breath as it draws in and out.

As we come to the end of the session, bring your awareness back to the room. Slowly open your eyes.

**VICTORIA  
BRAUN:**

So like I said, I really recommend this resource for you all-- Calm.com. But oh my gosh, it's 2017. There's like 100 different meditation apps out there.

So that would be if you wanted to really practice a concentrated sitting. That was three minutes. And I know, for a lot of us, even me, sometimes it's just excruciating.

As someone who has practiced meditation for many years now-- I do a lot of yoga, and try to infuse mindfulness into my world, anywhere I can-- there are meditations that, if I get two seconds of focus on the breath, and my brain doesn't immediately run away, squirrel, squirrel, then I am happy. Right? And that's great.

So if you really felt like that was a struggle, that's why I say, start really small, and just focus on

the breath.

So, right before I take any more questions, and come back to the main screen, here, I just wanted to give you an opportunity. So coming up in, let's see, I think starting mid-February, Health and Wellness services, over here-- it's over in the Pullman campus, but global students do have the opportunity to opt in as well-- are doing a new "TEXT STRESS" campaign.

I am so excited about this. So basically, all you would do is text the word "stress" to that number down there-- 30644. And for, I think, it's a 10-week period, what we are doing is giving people stress activities, mindfulness activities, cool research, things that you can do today to help you manage your stress.

I promise we don't spam you or anything. What this ends up looking like is, every other week-- I'm not sure which day we're doing it, it'll be one day a week-- we'll send you a message, and we'll say, hey, what's your stress level right now?

And then you come up, take it in, check in, and you say, all right, well, maybe I'm a 7 out of 10, whatever that means to you. And then, we're going to give you, based on that response there, a personalized stress tip. OK?

Well, you're at a 7. That's pretty high. Check out this activity. See if you can incorporate this into your day. They are actionable things that you can do, right now. Some of them are mindfulness. Other of them are other things that you can do to help you manage your stress.

And then at the end, if you're interested, we'll also give you all of your results, too, to see you and how you tracked your stress. You can opt out at any time. We don't spam you. We respect that.

We just want to give you some tools, and just have you start practicing. It's a very mindfulness-based activity, texting and-- I'm sorry-- responding with your stress level, checking in with the body, seeing how you're feeling, kind of bringing yourself back to the present moment.

So if you want to do this, this opportunity is available for you. Like I said, I'm so excited about this. I think this is great.

We do random drawings each week, I believe, for our Ferdinand's place. And we will send you coupons to Ferdinand's. However, Ferdinand's is in Pullman, so that's a little bit of a caveat for you all.

But this is still a really great opportunity. And I really hope that you might take it on.

So [INAUDIBLE] I'm looking at your question. My educational background is absolutely in mindfulness.

So I got my undergraduate degree at the Oregon State University in psychology. And then I went to graduate school, and my master's degree was in social cognitive psychology and Tibetan Buddhist philosophy.

So really, what it looked like was I did two years of research comparing different styles of meditation. So today, we talked about mindfulness and mindfulness meditation. And there's other kinds of meditation as well, where you might be trying to cultivate compassion or other kinds of things.

And so, I was looking at, OK, so we know mindfulness is so good for you. We know meditation is great for you. What are the differences, and are there differences, to practicing different kinds of meditation?

So I did a lot with that, and it was really great. So mindfulness was kind of an inherent component of what I was researching as my master's program.

And another thing I didn't get a chance to say, here, was a lot of us really enjoy our default states sometimes. A lot of us spend a lot of time in time travel. And I'll talk to certain folks, and they are like, wait, don't take away my time travel. I really like that.

That is OK. But just start being aware of how often you're in that time travel space.

So something that I started doing, just to have more of a relaxed and non-judgmental attitude, is that I catch myself hashing out old arguments all the time, like I said. Right? Time traveling back, and I'm thinking about what I would have said differently, or done differently.

And so, what I've been trying to do is just catch myself in them. I try to recognize that this isn't helping me at all. But sometimes, you just can't shake it. And that's OK.

I usually just try to laugh at myself though, because that's a great way to deal with things. And I usually get a laugh at myself, and just be like, oh, how's it going? How's it going in there, Victoria? Are you winning this argument that you're having with someone that hasn't even happened, or happened a year ago? Right?

I just try to laugh at myself, be like, are you winning? Are you doing good here? Yeah. That's absolutely a really common one, is time travel.

What about spacing out by the mind? Is it the mind's way of talking, taking time out from all the squirrel?

So spacing out, it kind of depends. I would really encourage you to notice what you're doing when your spacing out. Because sometimes, your brain, you just kind of glaze over, and you're not thinking anything. I think that's usually tiredness and overstimulation that's causing that.

But sometimes, our spacing out, you'll actually start to notice, now that you are aware of them, is you going to a default state. It's you not giving your brains anything to do that. And it's actually you kind of maintaining that squirrel brain.

And so really, I would just recognize. Start recognizing when you are spacing out, whatever that means to you, and just bring your attention back to the breath. And try to say that. I also love that-- taking time out from all the squirrel. That is absolutely how I'd put that.

Let me see. So Melissa, you're saying when you practice the one, two, three breaths, heightened emotions, do you have any suggestions on how to move away from that?

Absolutely. So do I have any suggestions for how to kind of move on? I think the best place to start is to just become aware of it, and practice labelling it. I think you'll notice, the more you just practice those first two steps, the more you will start to be able to calm down from it more quickly.

Really, just the awareness. Start super, super small. Baby steps. So just becoming aware, that is my first suggestion. Inhaling, acknowledging, labeling. Let yourself have it. Exhale.

OK, fine. We're starting with baby steps. You can go right back into being angry, whatever. And then you'll notice, the more that we do this, the more this ability is going to grow, and the more, on that exhale, that moving on, is actually going to be you kind of just calming down, and recognizing that this probably doesn't require as much of the mental energy or stress that you've been infusing it with.

So additionally, I mean, if you want to have a host of activities that you do, or maybe a couple

ideas of things that you can do for when you are feeling heightened levels of stress, or whatever those high emotions are, a walking meditation is an excellent idea.

Calm.com-- I don't know if you all saw on there-- has a walking meditation that's guided. So you could pop in some headphones, and just do that. Or just a walking meditation in general, it would just be intentionally walking, just being present in your body, noticing the feeling as your feet are touching the ground, noticing the temperature outside, noticing what's going on in your body, noticing your breath, and just doing that for a couple of minutes.

That's a great way to do it. So if you're noticing that heightened emotion, and you want to, all right, well, I'm not going into this. I think that is great.

My last suggestion, too, to help you create a little bit more space-- I didn't really get time to do this today-- would be there's this technique that is actually pretty well-researched right now, and it's been really found to do quite well, especially in teaching kids mindfulness-- because it's pretty hard to keep kids. They're nothing but squirrel brains.

So to teach kids mindfulness, they've found, it's called "take five." So what you do is you take the palm of your hand. I'm going to put it up like this, just so we can see it. Take the palm of your hand, and your other finger here.

When you're noticing that heightened emotion, you acknowledge it, you label it. OK. You're exhaling. And you need a little bit more space. You need a little bit more practice there, because you're still feeling a little elevated, perfect time for this.

So what we'll do is we'll take our palm and our hand. I'm going to put my finger in the center of my palm, here, and I'm going to breathe in and pull my finger out to the tip of my thumb, and exhale as I come back. Inhaling out to the forefinger, exhaling, coming back. Nice and slow, inhaling to the third, exhaling back, inhaling, ring finger, and back, into the pinky.

So as we're syncing our breath, here, the reason I really like this technique is because the sensory activation of you running your finger along your palm helps keep your brain focused on what you're supposed to be doing, which is just breathing.

And we always hear that advice, you know, you hear in anger management, or whatever-- just breathe. But the problem is that we're midway through breath two, and we're already back to what we were thinking about and feeling before.

So that's why I really recommend following this, and keeping that sensory activation, right there, keeps your brain focused on what you're supposed to be doing. And that's a really helpful tool.

So that's something to consider as well. And just remember that this is a practice. You're not going to immediately be good at this.

So I'm seeing another question, too. You're welcome. Seeing another question-- do I work one on one with students? Not particularly. I absolutely can. And I end up, people really engage with this content.

I find, especially a lot of my fellow administrators, and staff here, tend to really love this content. So I end up following up with e-mails.

So I really recommend-- I think my information should be on the description, I'm hoping, or it should be somewhere-- but I am so happy. If you wanted to email me, talk to me about your experience.

Also, like I said, I wrote a masters thesis on this. I wrote 150 pages on mindfulness and meditation. I have all of the resources.

So if you want more resources, research, more sites to try, anything like that, please feel free, email me, and I would love to-- there it is-- I would love to talk more about this. I'm always happy to do that.

So thank you, again. I really want to encourage you to try to bring this into your world, any way that you can. Try these mini doses and see if they do anything. And if you want to chat with me about them, please feel free.