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PSYCHOTHERAPY



'Tis visible silence, still as the hour-glass,  
Deep in the sun-searched growths the dragon-fly  
Hangs like a blue thread loosened from the sky:--  
So this winged hour is dropped to us from above.



## Who is Stacy?

I am a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in Tallahassee, Florida. I graduated from John F Kennedy University with a Masters in Counseling Psychology, and I also hold a Masters degree from Yale University.

I work in a private practice near downtown Tallahassee and am passionate about my work with individuals, couples, and adolescents. I specialize in loss and trauma, and am a Certified EMDR Therapist.

You can visit my website to learn more about me and my practice: [www.stacystoddard.com](http://www.stacystoddard.com)

## Did you know...

I'm on Twitter!  
First it was Facebook  
([www.facebook.com/StacyStoddardTherapy](http://www.facebook.com/StacyStoddardTherapy)) and  
now it's Twitter!  
Follow me!  
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# Therapy Thoughts

Summer 2014

Newsletter

## Mindfulness—What is it and how do I get it? - Part 2

In my last newsletter I introduced you to mindfulness, what it is and how to do it. And now comes the interesting part...Why does it matter? Why is it something that you'd even want to incorporate into your life?

Simply put, mindfulness meditation changes your brain. How, you ask?

Mindfulness meditation has an identifiable impact on the limbic system, or the part of the brain that is responsible for emotions. Specifically, mindfulness meditation has been shown to reduce activity in the amygdala, a region of the brain that determines how much stress we experience. People who have high stress have more active amygdalae, and meditation can help calm the stress hormone output from the amygdala, thus making them feel more calm.

Findings also show that mindfulness practices help people reduce their emotional reactivity to stressful situations by increasing activity in the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain that is in charge of activities such as decision-making, planning, abstract thinking, and regulating emotions.

If all that is a bit too scientific for you, here are some more down-to-earth facts about mindfulness. Physically, mindfulness meditation has been shown to reduce cortisol and blood pressure, and to improve the immune system. Cognitively, mindfulness decreases rumination and boosts attention. Emotionally, mindfulness reduces emotional reactivity and improves resilience.

Mindfulness practice is about attending to the present moment. It teaches us to notice how the

body feels, right now, paying attention to the breath and observing, without grasping onto our current state of mind. By definition, mindfulness moves us away from our personal narrative about how our life should be and into how life actually is, moment to moment.

The bottom line? Mindfulness is an opportunity for the brain to strengthen and enhance itself -- it's like taking the brain to the gym. And as your brain is strengthened in all these positive ways, you will inevitably notice a difference in your feelings about yourself, your relationships, and your ability to feel fulfilled in your life.

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My office is located in a quiet and private setting just east of downtown.

**You don't have to sit cross-legged with incense burning in order to meditate!**

## Five Things That Are Not True About Meditation

I know that when we think of meditation we imagine something like this:



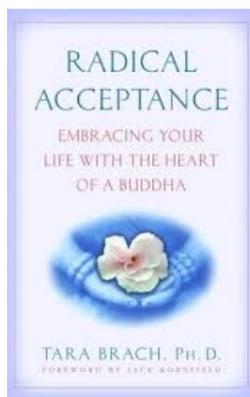
And then we imagine how our meditation won't look like that and we get discouraged. But here's the truth!

1. You don't have to sit cross-legged. Just sit! Even sitting in a chair is fine.
2. You don't have to sit in silence. In fact, you might try a guided meditation (there are a lot of places to download free ones on the internet) or soft background music.
3. You don't have to think of nothing. Just watch your thoughts come and go and notice them, but know that thoughts WILL come, and that's okay.
4. You don't need a perfectly quiet setting with a perfectly positioned meditation pillow and incense and candles. You just need a few minutes of uninterrupted time. Sitting in the car works perfectly!
5. You don't have to meditate alone. Try it with friends!

## Ten Tips to Starting Your Mindfulness Meditation Practice

Don't let starting a practice of mindfulness fall into the "I just need to [wait until Monday, wait until I lose weight, wait until I have more time, etc.] before I can meditate" trap. Here are 7 tips to help get started today:

1. Don't wait, don't think about it. Just like jumping off a diving board, you have to just do it.
2. Start small. Ten minutes can feel like forever when you're just starting. Start with three.
3. Use a timer. Or, if you love your phone, use an app. 'Stop, Breathe & Think' is a good one, and so is 'Insight Timer.'
4. Keep your eyes open. Find a comfortable, soft gaze, but don't close your eyes...at least not until you're sure you're not going to fall asleep.
5. Be consistent and track your progress. Do it every day, and journal a few sentences every day. You'll notice progress this way for sure!
6. Be gentle with yourself. You won't get it perfect, you'll accidentally miss some days, and you'll fall asleep the first time you try to meditate for 15 minutes. That's okay. Just start fresh tomorrow.
7. Stay with it! If you're motivated by personal challenges, see if you can meditate every day for 100 days!



## Book Recommendation - Radical Acceptance

Keeping with the theme of mindfulness, this book is a great read if you want to learn more about why mindfulness works. With a very gentle voice, author Tara Brach explains how radically accepting every moment—practicing mindfulness—can change your life. She uses down-to-earth language and examples, and gives exercises in each chapter for ways to practice what she's teaching.

What I most like about this book is the way she talks about the "trance of unworthiness," which is the way that we all can get consumed, without even realizing it, with feelings of self-loathing, and isolation. Brach normalizes those feelings and then shows us, gently, how to move ourselves out of them.

And don't be turned off if you're not a Buddhist! This book is for Christians, atheists, and everything in between.

Brach, T. (2004). *Radical acceptance: Embracing your life with the heart of a Buddha* (Bantam trade pbk. ed.). New York: Bantam Books.