

# How Mindfulness and Self-Compassion Can Support Greater Well-Being

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Lori Wong  
Insight Meditation Central Valley



# What I hope to share with you today

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- briefly introduce you to some current research on the efficacy of mindfulness and self-compassion practices for greater well-being
- introduce simple mindfulness practices for reducing mental rumination and cultivating focus and self-regulation
- introduce self-compassion practices to mitigate harmful self-judgement and allow for difficult mind states to be acknowledged
- discuss how mindfulness and self-compassion support one another to cultivate greater well-being.

# What is Mindfulness? What is Self-Compassion?

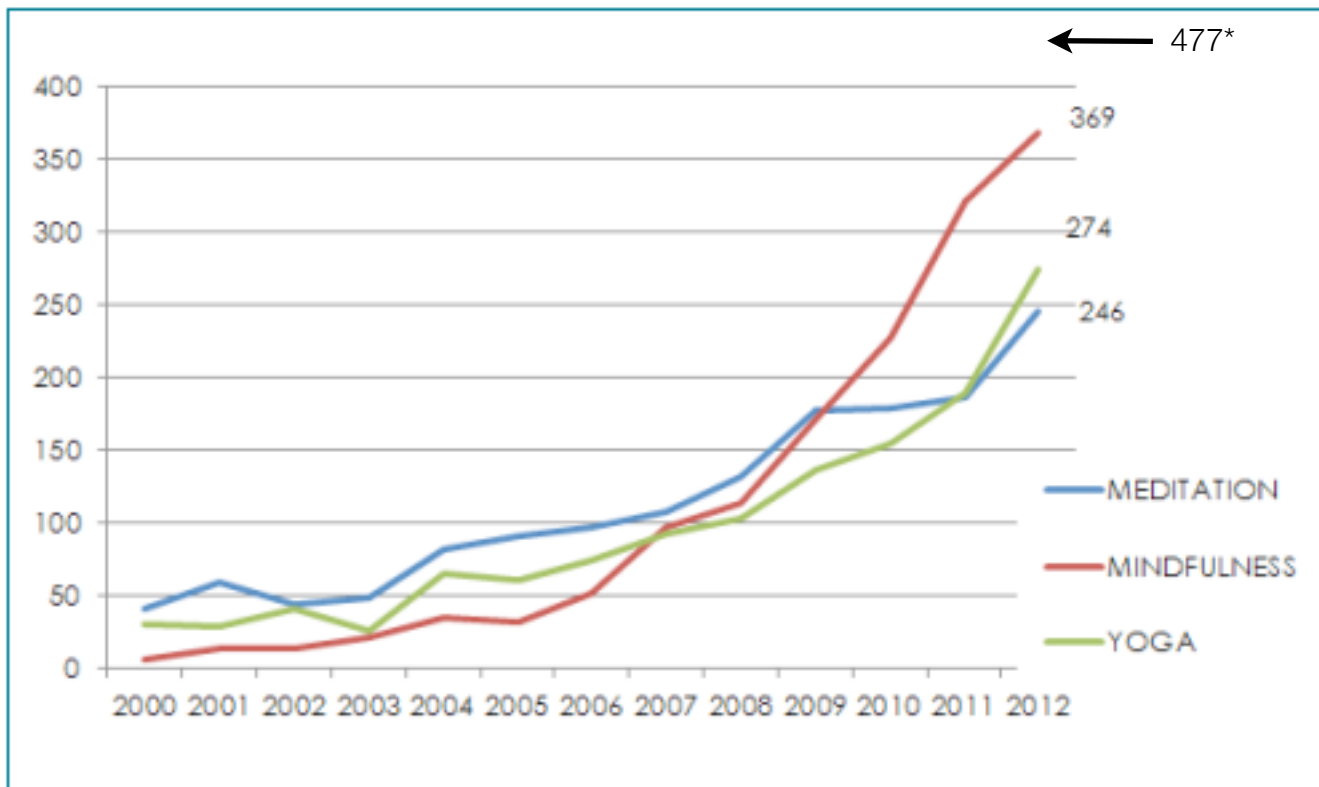
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## Mindfulness

- Jon Kabat-Zinn: “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgementally”
- to pay **attention** with a specific **intention** - to notice what is happening in our experience right now - **without resistance or reactivity** - so we can be fully present in an accepting and balanced way.

## Self-Compassion

- Kristin Neff: “treating yourself with the same type of kind, caring support and understanding that you would show to anyone you cared about.”
- Three components: **self-kindness**, **remembering imperfection** is part of the shared human experience, and **mindfulness**



The graph above represents the number of peer-reviewed publications as referenced by PubMed (through 2012). PubMed is a division of the US National Library of Medicine and the National Institute of Health.

From the Contemplative Mind in Life website:

<http://contemplativemind.wordpress.com/peer-reviewed-research-mindfulness-meditation-contemplative-practice/>

\*477 papers reported by DS Black (2013) Mindfulness Research Guide, [www.mindfulexperience.org](http://www.mindfulexperience.org)

# The Wandering Mind and Well-being

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- A Wandering Mind Is an Unhappy Mind  
random texts: How are you feeling? What are you doing? Are you thinking about something other than what you're doing? (2250 adults, mean age=34)  
People were less happy when mind wandering  
2010 Harvard study, Killingsworth & Gilbert
- A Wandering Mind May Also Be Associated With Cell Aging and Stress  
The higher the mind wandering, the shorter the telomere length  
Telomeres are a measure of biological aging and correlate of severe stress.  
2012 UCSF study, Epel, Puterman, et al

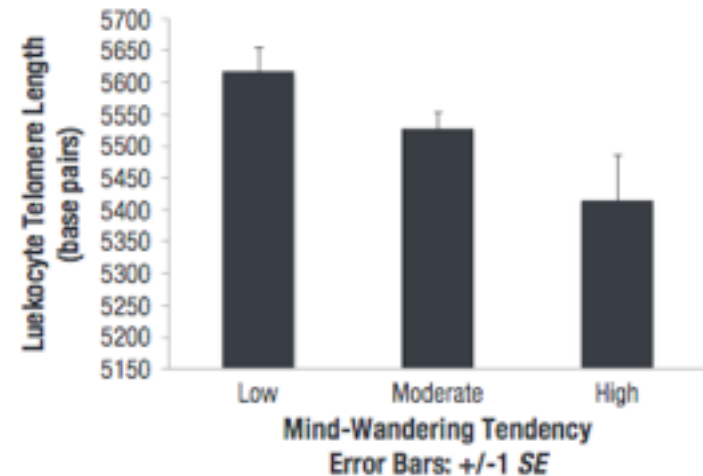


Fig. 1. Leukocyte telomere length by mind-wandering groups.

# Benefits of Mindfulness

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- 20 Scientific Reasons to Start Meditating Today  
a great article by Emma Seppala ([www.emmaseppala.com](http://www.emmaseppala.com)):
  - increases immune function, decreases pain & cellular-level inflammation
  - increases positive emotion, decreases depression, anxiety & stress
  - increases social connection, emotional intelligence, compassion, feel less lonely
  - enhances self-regulation of emotions
  - actually changes the structure of your brain!
- Mindfulness Research Update: 2008  
(Jeffrey Greeson, Duke University, Complementary Health Practice Review, January 2009)
  - reduces symptoms of stress & negative mood states
  - increases emotional well-being & quality of life among persons with chronic illness
  - as little as a 4-week training reduced distress by decreasing rumination
  - more joyful, inspired, grateful, hopeful, content, vital, and satisfied with life
  - regulate well-being & ability to correct or repair unpleasant mood states

# Benefits of Self-Compassion

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- Self-Compassion - Kristen Neff, Christopher Germer  
reduces self-criticism, depression, increases optimism & life satisfaction  
([www.selfcompassion.org](http://www.selfcompassion.org) and [www.mindfulselfcompassion.org](http://www.mindfulselfcompassion.org))
- Self-Compassion Can Moderate Reactions to Unpleasant Self-Relevant Events  
2007 Duke University study, Leary, Tate, Allen, et al
  - less-reactivity to outcomes, and reduction of impact of negative events
  - self-compassion uniquely predicted greater equanimity in three scenarios (getting a poor grade on an important test, being responsible for the team losing an athletic competition, forgetting a part in a stage performance resulting in the performance coming to an embarrassing halt)
  - changes people's relationships to their self-evaluations, less harsh in self-judgement
- Self-Compassion Activates “Self-Soothing”  
2005 study, Gilbert & Irons
  - deactivates insecurity and defensiveness, activates feelings of safety
  - self-compassion promotes emotional regulation, but self-esteem does not

# Mindfulness Practices

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- Mindfulness of Posture
- Mindfulness of Movement
- Mindfulness of Sound
- Mindfulness of Breath
- Mindfulness of Feeling Tone
- Mindfulness of Emotions
- Mindfulness of Thoughts



# Mindfulness of Posture

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- How the body and mind affect one another
- Take-away:  
Notice your posture and mood during the day:
  - while driving
  - in meetings or in class
  - when you're stressed
  - when you're relaxed

# Mindfulness of Movement

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- Becoming intimate with the body in motion
- Take-aways:
  - Standing meditation can be done while waiting in line!
  - Walking meditation can be done while walking to/from your car or to/from your office
  - Movement can be useful as an alternative or a transition to sitting meditation
  - You can practice in any task: washing dishes, brushing your teeth, folding clothes, bathing, etc.

# Mindfulness of Sound

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- Using sound as a way to be present
- Take-aways:
  - Mindfulness does not require tremendous effort
  - We can use sound as an alternative object
  - Offers spaciousness and a wider field of awareness
- Important points:
  - Do not use music - it's easy to get entangled with emotion and words or thoughts
  - If you hear people talking, don't try to make out the words - this is an experience of sound, not listening to what people are saying

# Mindfulness of the Breath

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- Paying attention to the breath at one of three locations: belly, chest, or upper lip
- Observing habits of mind against this marker (object of attention)
- Use noting, if helpful:
  - Silently note: inhale, exhale
  - Silently count exhalations up to 10, then start over
  - Enjoy the peaceful feeling of the breath
- Take-aways:
  - The breath can cue us into what's happening in the body - emotions/ thoughts and breath are often entangled
  - Builds self-regulation, can be calming

Christian mystic St. Francis de Sales:

*"If the heart wanders or is distracted, bring it back to the point quite gently... And even if you did nothing during the whole of your hour but bring your heart back..., though it went away every time you brought it back, your hour would be very well employed."*

# Mindfulness of Feeling Tone

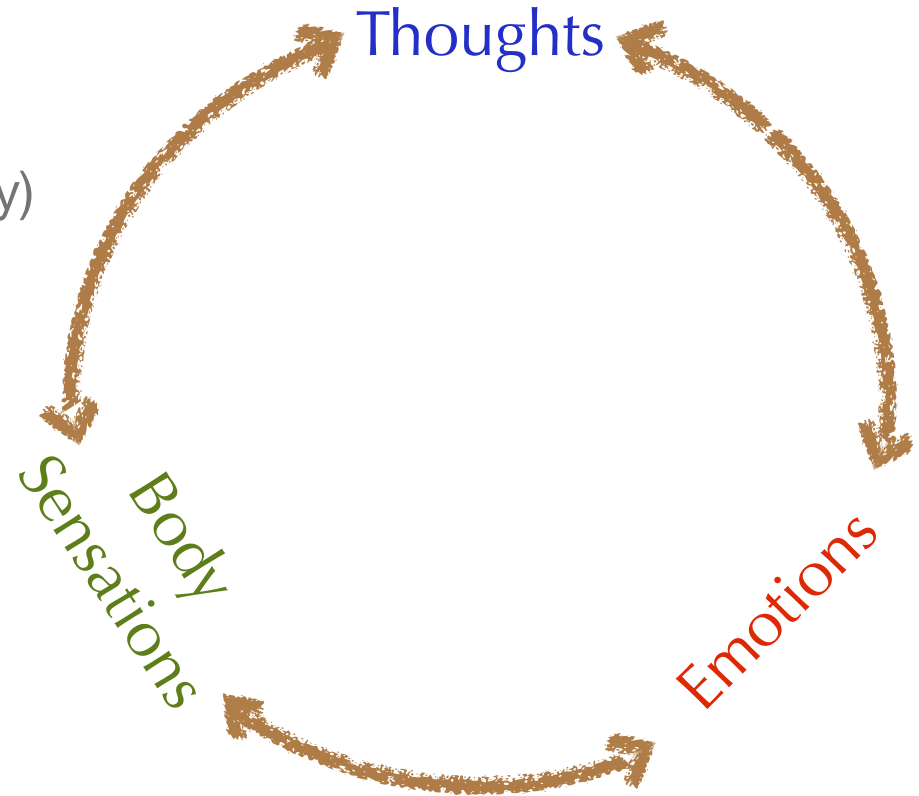
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- Qualities of our experience that are: pleasant, unpleasant, neutral (neither)
- These qualities change and they are not inherent in the object or experience
- Cultivating resilience: Changing our mindset of “fix-it” to “allow”
- Everything is always changing: change is neither good or bad, but we often only look at “bad” change - our preference is biased to pleasant, developing tolerance to unpleasant
- Take-aways:
  - We can learn to tolerate different feeling tones by noticing how they change without having to do anything
  - We can learn how conditions affect the feeling tone for a similar experience
  - Emotions are preceded by a particular feeling tone and healthy or unhealthy mind state
  - This too shall pass (both pleasant and unpleasant)!

# Mindfulness of Emotions

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- Notice the relationship between your body sensations and mood or emotion
- Observing thoughts, moods, emotions, attitudes => like the weather - changing, not personal
- Breaking the link of reactivity
  - Stop fueling the fire (drop the story)
  - Let the fire burn out
- What channel am I on?
- STOP:
  - Stop
  - Take a breath
  - Observe
  - Process or Proceed



# Watching Thoughts as Passing Phenomena

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“Our thoughts are always happening. Much like leaves floating down a stream or clouds crossing the sky, they just keep on coming. They arise in the form of sensations, feelings, memories, anticipations, and speculations. While we can’t stop the thoughts themselves, we can stop our awareness from being snared by each one.

If you are standing by a river and a leaf floats by, you have your choice of following the leaf with your eye or keeping your attention fixed in front of you. The leaf floats out of your line of vision. Another leaf enters...and floats by.

But as we stand on the bank of the river and the leaves float by, there is no confusion as to whether or not we are the leaves. Similarly, it turns out that there is a place in our minds from which we can watch our own mental images go by. We aren’t our thoughts any more than we are the leaves.”

- Ram Dass & Paul Gorman



# Self-Compassion Practices

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- Loving-Kindness and Kindness to Self
  - Cultivating the quality of care and warmth
  - Starting with a loved one and then applying it to oneself as a child, then as an adult
- Accepting and Soothing
  - Recognizing difficulty and suffering in our inner experience
  - Connecting to our common humanity (normalizing)
  - Connecting to the felt sense of comfort
  - Opening the space to accept what's present

# Loving-kindness and Kindness to Self

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- Bring an image of a loved one or a pet to mind
- Connect to the feeling of warmth or care or love
- Silent phrases of loving-kindness:
  - “May I be happy”
  - “May I be safe”
  - “May I be well”
  - “May I have peace and ease”
- Imagine this loved one facing difficulty or suffering
- Silent phrases of care:
  - “May you be free from suffering”
  - “May you have peace and joy”



# Accepting and Soothing

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- Accepting and Soothing (Self-Compassion Break)

“This is a moment of [difficulty, stress, suffering]” - recognition/mindfulness

“Suffering [difficulty, stress] is a part of life” - seeing you’re not alone/common humanity

Place one or both hands over the heart - embodiment/enhancing self-regulation

- connect with the felt sense of the hands
- warmth, pressure, movement of the chest, any comforting qualities

“May I be kind to myself” - kindness

“May I accept myself just as I am” - acceptance/non-judging

“May I be happy and free from suffering”

“May I find peace and joy”

More practices can be found here:

<http://www.centerformsc.org/meditations>

<http://www.centerformsc.org/video->

# Resources

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- Insight Meditation Central Valley  
<http://imcv.org>
- Audiodharma  
<http://audiodharma.org>
- Mindfulness Research Monthly  
<http://mindfulexperience.org>
- Mindful Self-Compassion  
<http://mindfulselfcompassion.org>
- Self-Compassion  
<http://www.selfcompassion.org>
- Modesto Zen Buddhist Recovery Group  
<http://modestozen.org/about/recovery-group/>