

CURRICULUM OUTLINE

STRESS REDUCTION CLINIC

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAL CENTER

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Introduction

The Stress Reduction Clinic is an outpatient service of the Division of Preventive and Behavioral Medicine in the Department of Medicine at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. It delivers an intervention which might best be called mindfulness-based stress reduction. The core program takes the form of an eight-week “course” to which medical patients are referred by their physicians and in which they undergo training in a class-like setting in the daily discipline of mindfulness meditation and its applications in everyday life. Prior to enrollment, each prospective participant is evaluated in an individual hour-long interview with a clinic staff person, during which time relevant history is obtained and the program and its challenging requirements outlined (see Kabat-Zinn and Chapman-Waldrop, 1988). A comprehensive description of the program and a detailed presentation of our approach to the meditation practice are provided in Full Catastrophe Living (1990), in Wherever You Go There You Are (1994) and in Heal Thy Self (1999).

Regarding the way we present the program, it is important to keep in mind that a curriculum of any kind needs to be seen as an overall guide, not a straightjacket. It is best seen as a dynamic system designed for continual adaptation for delivery under different circumstances and adaptable to the contingencies and requirements of the present moment. Only the fundamentals are invariant. This is particularly true of the teaching meditation. Although I teach the same thing over and over again, and stay fairly close to the format outlined below, it is also accurate to say that I never teach the same class twice. Each class is unique, and its qualities come in large part out of the participants and out of the uniqueness of the present moment.

This curriculum must be sensitive to the unique local conditions (social, economic, cultural) and to the explicitly defined short and long-term objectives of the intervention. For example, the UMMC Stress Reduction Clinic conducts eight-week programs in a satellite inner city stress reduction program in Worcester, and in a number of different prisons in Massachusetts in collaboration with the Massachusetts Committee on Criminal Justice and the Massachusetts Department of Corrections. In each venue, the formal curriculum differs in some detail in important ways from that presented here, although all programs share the overall orientation of mindfulness-based stress reduction.

A Word About Teaching: The delivery of mindfulness-based stress reduction in any location is virtually impossible without a skilled teacher who is grounded in the practice of mindfulness him or herself. The curriculum which follows is only a general guide and indicates the overall content we try to keep in mind in approaching each of the eight classes which make up the course in our hospital setting. In order for a class or for the program as a whole to have any meaning or vitality, the person who is delivering it must make every effort to embody the practice in his or her own life and teach out of personal experience and his or her own wisdom, not just in a cookbook fashion out of theory and out of the thinking mind. Otherwise, the

instruction becomes a mechanical didactic exercise at best and the true virtues of the mindfulness approach will be lost. We never ask anything of our patients that we are not asking of ourselves to a greater degree, moment to moment and day by day.

A great deal of sensitivity to individual differences, to people who are in pain of one kind or another, to group dynamics, to one's own fears and attachments, motives and behaviors, to the reasons for asking participants to engage in various aspects of the work, and to the unique attributes of each location, time, and population in which one finds oneself is required of anyone hoping to take on such a role. Above all, a strong commitment to one's own daily meditation practice, an ability to use a vocabulary and idiom which connects with people rather than creates distance and resistance, and a willingness to embrace in awareness and non-judgmentally those aspects of oneself that one is most highly defended against, are essential qualities for the successful pursuit of this work.

The UMMC stress reduction program can be thought of as a course designed to help people to recognize and mobilize their inner psychological resources for taking better care of themselves as a complement to the medical treatments they receive through more traditional health care routes. It is based on relatively intensive training in mindfulness meditation and its applications for coping with stress, pain, and the challenges of everyday life compounded by a chronic illness or life-threatening disease. Although, as outlined here, each class has a specific theme and makes use of diverse teaching devices and approaches, the formal and informal practice of mindfulness serves as the unifying thread, integrating all the themes into a coherent whole (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, 1993). The object is to keep things simple and clear. Mindfulness practice is a very narrow path, yet since it has to do with attention and wakefulness, it has the potential, if well taught, to impinge in a fundamental way on all aspects of our lives.

In the evaluation interview, patients are reminded that their decision to enroll amounts to a commitment to an immediate lifestyle change in the form of: (1) weekly attendance at 2.5 hour classes (the first and last class are 3 hours), with approximately 25-30 patients per class; (2) approximately one hour per day, six days per week minimum devoted to formal and informal meditative practices assigned for "homework" or "home practice" each week; (3) attendance at a 7-hour silent retreat in the sixth week of the course (held on the weekend). Participants are also seen individually following completion of the program in another hour-long interview to discuss the course and its impact on the individual and the question of future goals and intentions. The individual interviews are the timepoints at which a range of pre- and post-intervention outcome data are obtained (see outcome measures section).

What follows below is a concise outline of the major themes, content, and home practice assignments for the UMMC course. Note that each participant receives two guided mindfulness meditation practice audiotapes, with each side 45 minutes in length. Tape 1/Side 1 is a guided body scan meditation, and Tape 1/Side 2 a guided mindful hatha yoga sequence. Tape 2/Side 1 is a guided sitting meditation, and Tape 2/Side 2 is a different guided mindful hatha yoga sequence. Tape 1 is given out in Class #1. Tape 2 is given out in Class #5. Participants are also given a Stress Reduction Workbook, in which are assigned additional mindfulness exercises and brief readings from week to week, and which participants bring to class each week.

References for this Section

- Kabat-Zinn, J. and Chapman-Waldrop, A. Compliance with an outpatient stress reduction program: rates and predictors of completion. J. Behav. Med. (1988) 11:333-352.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain and Illness, Delacorte, NY 1990
- Kabat-Zinn, J. Mindfulness Meditation: Health Benefits of an Ancient Buddhist Practice. In Goleman, D. and Gurin, J. (eds). Mind/Body Medicine, Consumer Reports Books, Yonkers, NY, 1993, Chapter 15, pp. 259-275.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life, Hyperion, New York, Jan. 1994
- Santorelli, S.F. Heal Thy Self: Lessons on Mindfulness in Medicine Random House/Bell Tower, 1999

Class #1

Welcome

Review of contract and guidelines for participation

Brief introduction to the program by the instructor

Theme: From our point of view, there is more right with you than wrong with you, no matter what your problems are. Problems can be worked with, and this course is an opportunity to do that in a supportive environment. Meditative awareness is fundamental in this work since the present moment is the only time anyone ever has to perceive, learn, grow or change.

Go around the room and give people the opportunity to introduce themselves, what they are here for, their expectations for the program, and to say one (or more) positive things about themselves (i.e. what are you like when you are your most relaxed self). In a large class, this can take more than an hour. Helpful if the instructor makes appropriate comments, observations, and welcoming remarks from time to time in response to individuals. Sometimes it's good to have people talk for a few minutes with their neighbors before opening up the discussion to the larger group.

Raisin-eating exercise: first introduction to mindfulness meditation. Discussion of the experience. Point out the raisin's "belly button" and make tie into theme of interconnectedness...the raisin didn't come out of nowhere; it was connected to something larger which nourished its growth. Theme of interbeing (without necessarily using that term: can you see the sunlight, the cloud, the rain, the earth, the farmer, the trucker, in the raisin?

Tie the moment-to-moment awareness of eating exercise (seeing, chewing, tasting, swallowing) to experiencing the breath in the same way. Get people down on the floor, focusing on the feeling of the abdomen rising and falling with the inbreath and the outbreath, "tasting" the breath in the same way that we tasted the raising...mindfully. Concept of "riding the waves" of one's own breathing from moment to moment...non-judgmentally; and bringing one's attention back to the breath and the present moment when it wanders.

From mindfulness of breathing, go into guided body scan with people continuing to lie on floor. Give instructions for use of the tape (side 1 only) for home practice during week 1.

Finish with discussion of people's experiences with the body scan.

Homework assignment: Tape 1/Side 1 \geq 6 days this week

Workbook: 9 dots exercise
needs assessment
read upstream/downstream fable
eat one meal this week mindfully

Class #2

Do guided body scan with people on the floor: 30-45 minutes

Small groups, then large group: Discuss the body scan experience of this morning; also discuss how it went practicing the body scan with the tape this week, with particular attention to how successful they were at making the time for it; problems and obstacles they encountered; how they worked with them or not; experiences and what people are learning (seeing) about themselves from it, if anything. Establish the universality of the wandering mind and the notion of working with it with acceptance and repeated re-focusing of attention; the coming back is as much a part of the meditation as the staying on the object of attention; noting where the mind goes and what is on one's mind; emphasize importance of desisting from repressing and suppressing thoughts or feelings or forcing things to be a certain way. Make analogy with going to sleep. Can't be forced. Best way to get somewhere is to not try to get anywhere...letting go. A new way of learning. The body has its own language and its own intelligence. Non-conceptual.

Theme: Perception and creative responding: how you see things (or don't see them) will determine in large measure how you will respond to them. This ties in with how people see their participation in the program; how they see their pain, their illness; the stress and pressures in their lives; the level of commitment they will bring to the program and to the personal discipline it requires. Make the connection to stress reactivity and recovery from acute stressors, and the principle that "It's not the stressors per se but how you handle them" which influences the short and long-term health effects they may have on your mind and your body."

Discuss the homework: the 9 dots and the theme of expanding the field of awareness in problem identification and problem solving. Use the old woman/young woman "trompe L'oeil" as well to make the point of different ways of seeing or not seeing. The breakthrough "aha!" experience. Tie in to health care system and role of prevention and individual responsibility with the Upstream/Downstream story. Tie in other things in this section of the workbook; also review needs assessment.

Introduce sitting meditation with awareness of breathing as primary object of attention. Do a short (10-15 minutes) guided sitting. Then include in weekly homework assignments in addition to the 45 minutes using Tape 1.

Homework: Tape 1/Side 1 \geq 6 times per week
Sitting meditation: 10-15 minutes per day.
Workbook: fill out pleasant events calendar for the week – one entry per day.
Mindfulness of routine activities: brushing teeth, washing dishes, taking a shower, taking out garbage, shopping, reading to kids, eating.

Class #3

Do one hour or more of mindful yoga, guiding the class slowly through the sequence of postures on Tape 1/Side 2, with appropriate teaching comments interspersed as required. It is important to emphasize pressing the back into the floor as one does the initial stretch up over the head with the arms while lying on one's back. Encourage people to be conservative and to listen carefully to their own bodies. Emphasis is on mindfulness and approaching one's limits with gentleness. They are encouraged to avoid any postures they feel would cause injury or a setback, or to experiment very cautiously when in doubt. Pay particular attention to people with chronic problems with the lower back, neck, and chronic pain in general. Verbal guidance needs to be explicit and accurate (i.e. if lying on the floor: "...as you breathe out, drawing the right knee up to the chest and wrapping your arms around the shin...") so that people know what you are actually asking them to do without having to look at you all the time. Pelvic tilts and other postures may need to be demonstrated. It also helps to move around room and instruct people individually.

Discuss the experience and assign for homework alternating yoga with the body scan. Emphasize the importance of getting down on the floor and working mindfully with your body every day, if only for a few minutes!

Do a guided sitting meditation with focus on awareness of breathing (maybe 20 minutes) and assign for homework in addition to Tape 1.

Discuss the homework from last week: the body scan and the daily short sitting meditations. Importance of being embodied, in the meditation practice, in the yoga, and in life. What does this mean?

Go over pleasant events calendar, with emphasis on mind/body connections, patterns, what people observed/learned about themselves. See if some of this can be tied in to experiences of pleasant moments during the body scan in the past week.

Theme: There is pleasure and power in being present. You only have moments to live. Thoreau's "bloom of the present moment." Martha Graham's "make the moment vital and worth living...do not let it slip away unnoticed and unused." Observation that we miss many of our pleasant moments, perhaps focusing only on the unpleasant ones. There of connection/belonging/contact being an important element of pleasant moments. Also not wanting anything...just appreciating what you already have. Also that you can have pleasant moments in spite of being in a crisis or in pain. Tie in to body scan and to the experience of working with mind and body in the yoga.

Finish class with a short (2-3 min) sitting.

Homework: Alternate Side 1 with Side 2 of Tape 1 \geq 6 days/week
Sitting meditation with AOB 20 min/day
Workbook: Unpleasant events calendar for the week, one entry per day.
Make an effort to "capture" your moments during the day.
Mindfulness of going on "automatic pilot" and under what circumstances it occurs.
What pulls you off center?
What do you most not want to look at?

Class #4

Sitting meditation with focus on breath, body sensations, body as a whole (30 Minutes).

Discuss homework: especially how things went with the yoga. Fine-tune the yoga instructions as required. Ask about the effect of doing the yoga on the body scan and doing the body scan on the yoga. What are people seeing, feeling, learning? Small groups.

Note: Classes 4 and 5 present the central core of the relationship of the meditation practice to stress. (See FCL, Section 3 and parts of Section 4 for background and details for possible inclusion).

Theme: Awareness of being stuck in one's life and how to get unstuck. Dealing with the shadow side of stress and pain, and darkness. Read/tell illustrative story, such as Grimm's The Water of Life. What happens to the two older brothers? The younger brother? (see Wherever You Go There You Are for an example of this discussion). Listening to and trusting one's own dwarf energy (inner wisdom). Tie in to the whole question of stress and stress reactivity/automaticity/mindlessness/Thich Nhat Hanh's "watering the seeds of suffering." How people often cope by escape...the dark & shadow side: drugs, alcohol, suppression of feelings; suicide. Emphasize that "It's not the stress but how you handle it which dictates its effects on the mind and the body (within limits). Explore with the class: What is stress? How does it influence mind, body, health? Discuss the unpleasant events calendar. Tie in to the question of what makes something unpleasant; patterns of behavior. Association with expectations, not getting one's own way (what is my way, anyway...and would I know it if I got it, and how long would it last?) Definitions of stress and stressors (Selye) and psychological stress (Lazarus) in workbook. Elicit list of what people find most stressful in their lives and how they cope. Review notion of coping and definition (Lazarus). Go over reacting vs. responding schema in workbook (FCL pp 249, 265). Best to bring it out in discussion rather than straight lecture. Tie in to common experiences of stress reactivity in everyday living, and options for responding differently. Tie in to the meditation practice, and mindfulness in daily living. Connect mindfulness with perception/appraisal in the critical moment, and with the arising of reactive emotions. Finish class with a short sitting (5-10 minutes)

Homework: Alternate Side 1 with Side 2 ≥ 6 days per week.
Sitting Meditation 20 min per day with AOB, sensations, body as a whole.
Workbook: fill out Social Readjustment Rating Scale
Read section on emotions and health (FCL Chapter 24)
Be aware of stress reactions during the week, without trying to change them in any way.
Awareness of feeling stuck.
Awareness of blocking, numbing, shutting off to the moment when it happens this week.

Class #5

Note: Program half-over today. Discuss how it's been going so far. Pause and take stock: am I learning, growing, changing? Where am I now? Am I doing it the way I committed to doing it? Am I doing it the best way I can at this time? Ask whether people are willing to recommit to the practice fully for the next half (new beginning). Note that growth is non-linear. Let go of expectations for second half based on experience of first half of course. Just practice and take each moment as a new beginning, a fresh opportunity to be fully engaged, fully alive.

Guided sitting meditation with particular attention to the observing and recognition of thoughts, as "events" in your consciousness, distinguishing the event from the content (30-40 minutes). Emphasize stillness to the extent possible.

Discuss the meditation and yoga homework.

Discuss observations of reacting to stressful events during the week. Also life change events and their relationship to health. Discuss the importance of the meaning of the events in people's lives as a moderating influence to health effects. Cite Langer and Rodin's nursing home study with plants, and theme of control/connectedness.

Theme: Reacting and responding to stress. Role of emotional reactivity in health and illness. Type A behavior and the expression of hostility and cynicism. Seligman's work on learned optimism and pessimism. Type C behavior and the suppression of emotion. Learning to honor one's feelings, anger, sadness, hurt, grief, and express them effectively to achieve one's purposes. Mindfulness of one's purposes in this regard and how we can compound our problems rather than find effective solutions. Review problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies. Role of mindfulness in both.

Finish class with a short sitting meditation.

Homework: Tape 2/Side 1 Sitting meditation tape. Alternate with either body scan or yoga from Tape 1. Emphasize that this tape has much more silence on it to allow people to practice more deeply on their own in between the guided instructions. It "ups the ante"

Workbook: fill out difficult communications calendar. Read entire section on passive, aggressive, assertive behaviors. Answer questions in workbook. Bring awareness to moments of reacting and explore options for responding with greater mindfulness and creativity. Do this in the meditation practice as well. Practice opening up space for responding in the present moment. Use the breath to slow things down.

Class #6

Sitting meditation 30-45 minutes. Good place to introduce mountain meditation and/or lake meditation. These images are used to help people understand the practice on a deeper level, not to take them out of the present moment to some other place or time.

Discuss the homework, especially how it went with the sitting meditation tape.

Discuss the up-coming all day session and how to handle the periods of silent sitting. Tell people what to bring and what to expect: Lunch, loose fitting clothes (layers), mat or pad.

Discuss difficult communications calendar and passive, aggressive, assertive patterns. Example of how one says “no” and resistance/difficulty in saying “no” to some people.

Theme: Stressful communications; assertiveness; knowing your feelings; expressing your feelings effectively and barriers to doing so. Maintaining your center in interpersonal relationships, especially under conditions of acute or chronic stress (caring for an elderly parent or handicapped child), the strong expectations of others, past habits of emotional expression/suppression and the presentation of self in everyday life.

Do aikido-based “pushing exercises”, roleplaying passive, passive-aggressive, aggressive, “stuck”, helpless, and assertive/blending/ “entering” options. Demonstrate first with a volunteer (choose carefully, trusting your intuition), then have a whole class do if there is time and people are willing. Importance of centering in the moment, taking a firm stand, not running but not having to be in total control; the importance of stepping out of the way, of making contact (hand to wrist), of turning, of acknowledging the other person’s point of view; showing one’s own point of view; staying in the process without knowing where it is going or being fully in control; maintaining mindfulness, openness, staying grounded and centered.

Finish class with a short sitting.

Homework: Alternate Tape 2/Side 1 with Body Scan and/or Yoga from either tape.

Workbook: read section on diet and nutrition (FCL Chapter 31).

Pay attention to what you put in your body; where it comes from, how much; why; reactions and effects. Not just food; what we take in through eyes and ears and nose; diet of TV, newspapers, bad news, air pollution.

Remind people of the all-day silent meditation retreat on the weekend and review how to work with the silence. What to bring, how to dress, etc.

Class #7

Sometimes I begin this class by having people change seats several times. Look at the room from different perspectives. Is it the same room? Why did you choose to sit where you did when you came in? Choose a seat you think you won't like. What does that feel like? Them of being at home wherever you are. Also awareness of subtle things like choices of positioning oneself in a room, idea of taking one's seat in the meditation (taking a stand sitting, no matter where you are). Awareness of attachment to place. Where am I in my life – in this moment? Where am I going?...Don't know.

Sitting meditation: 30 minutes with choiceless awareness, using the breath for an anchor if get lost.

Discuss the all-day retreat: reactions and responses to it, likes and dislikes. Feelings afterwards. What you saw, what you learned about yourself. Responses to different teachers, to different aspects of the day. Tie in to the meditation practice this week, both formal and informal (daily life). Emphasis on importance of making the practice one's own. This week, no tape for homework. Encourage people to take same 45 minutes, and practice on their own. They decide what, how much, etc.

Show 15 minute sequence of Ornish tape (Heart). Use to discuss diet, also communication, anger, hostility, etc. Carry over and finish the communications theme.

Theme: How what we take in (diet in broadest sense of the term) affects our health and well-being. Discuss fat in the American diet, relationship to CAD and cancer. Discuss Ornish's work with CAD regression with lifestyle changes including low-fat diet, yoga, meditation, and walking; expression of feelings; role of social isolation; social support. Mention chemicals in diet, in water supplies, cancer epidemiology in Massachusetts towns; pollution in food chain (PCB's, heavy metals, etc). Importance of reading labels on foods. Studies relating total caloric intake to health and disease. Importance of mindfulness in making choices about diet. Emphasize "no right way". Social significance of food and eating. These are simply areas to possibly touch on. Again, the theme should be mindfulness of impulses around food and diet. Diets of violence, low self-esteem, abuse, depression, anxiety included. How to move out of self-destructive patterns to more healthy patterns. Mindfulness of obstacles to this, especially mind-patterns.

Have people sign up for evaluation interviews following end of the program. Can do this again in class #8.

Homework: No tape. Practice the formal practice on one's own as best one can.
Informal practice (mindfulness in daily life) practiced on one's own in preparation for when course is over.
Pay attention to what you put into your body: how much: when; what; how often; fat content; cholesterol content; read labels. Know sources of food.

Class #8

Body scan for about 30 minutes (coming full circle, since that is what they started out with on day 1), everybody on the floor. Go from that into Sitting Meditation for another 30-40 minutes.

Small group discussion on floor; then large group discussion: examples of questions: (1) think back to why you came originally – expectations – and why you stayed; (2) What did you want/hope for? (3) What did you get out of it, if anything? What did you learn? (4) What sacrifices did you make? What were the costs to you? (5) What are your biggest obstacles to growth and healing? (6) What strategies might work to not get stuck?

Touch on how it went practicing without tapes this week. Invite people to say how they feel about the course ending.

Review the entire course and focus briefly on salient features.

Theme: Keeping up the momentum and discipline developed over the past 7 weeks in the meditation practice, both formal and informal. “The eighth week is the rest of your life.” Review range of supports to help in the process over time: books, tapes, graduate programs, free all-day sessions for all graduates 3 times per year; mention retreat centers. Hand out Hints and Reminders booklet with reading list. Have a closing ceremony in a circle at the end. Sitting, then holding hands around the circle, eyes closed.

Homework: Go back to the tapes, using whichever techniques you wish. Keep up the practice and make it your own.
Bring three short-term (3 months) and three long-term (3 years or more) goals which come out of your direct experience in the program and with the meditation practice to your evaluation interview. Include potential obstacles to reaching these goals and your strategies for working with them to keep the momentum of your practice moving and growing.

All-Day Session

Typical Schedule

9:00 – 9:05	Ring bells, sit 5 minutes in silence...nothing said.
9:05 – 9:20	Welcome, introduction, and ground rules.
9:20 – 9:50	Sitting meditation: focus on awareness of breathing.
9:50 – 10:50	Guided Yoga, maybe ending with short body scan.
10:50 – 11:10	Slow walking meditation: guided with introduction.
11:10 – 11:30	Sitting meditation: less guidance, more silence.
11:30 – 11:40	Slow walking meditation.
11:40 – 12:00	Guided mountain/lake meditation
12:00 – 12:15	Talk
12:15 – 12:20	Instructions for silent mindful lunch
12:20 – 12:30	Attendance taking
12:30 – 1:30	Lunch and mindful walking outside or inside on own.
1:30 – 2:00	Slow, fast, crazy walking, ending with slow backwards walking with eyes closed, gathering in center of room, humming like bees.
2:00 – 2:30	Loving kindness meditation, ending in stillness. Low on talk.
2:30 – 3:00	Short (5-10 min) sittings alternated with short walkings (5 min), sitting anywhere one can when change occurs.
3:00 – 3:05	Whispering to neighbors...about how the day has been so far
3:05 – 4:00	Large group discussion, questions, responses about the day and the meditation practice. Emphasize that the day was not meant to be pleasant. Question of how one works with whatever appears. Invite people who had difficulties to speak about them and feel supported.
4:00 – 4:20	Final sitting...end with closing ceremony, holding hands around the room, looking around, making eye contact, tuning into feeling whole and embedded in larger wholes.
4:20 – 4:30	Good Byes.