Meditation: Moment by Moment, Mindfulness Practice for Caregivers

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“Living in the present is where our true self is…. I now know that in this journey towards my true self, with dementia stripping away the layers of cognition and emotion, I am becoming who I really am. …All we can do is intensely experience the now of each moment with you. Treasure these moments and you will be able to share true acceptance of self.”

~ Christine Bryden, Dancing With Dementia

A few things we can learn from someone living with a dementia when we are truly present:
...to be spontaneous
...to be open to new experiences & forms of expression
...to open our hearts
...to not identify so much with our thoughts
...to slow down
...to not bring past resentments and frustrations into the present
...to be grateful for the small things and then realize they are quite big things
...to laugh more
...to live in the moment
...to be real

The Velveteen Rabbit – by Margery Williams (1922)
What is Mindfulness?

“Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.”

Jon Kabat-Zinn

Cultivating mindfulness is training the mind to develop greater awareness of the present moment, including current physical sensations, thoughts, and feelings, without judging one’s self or one’s experience.

#1 Mindful care partners know how & when to provide care for themselves.

#2 Mindful care partners understand the complexity of their stressors and know how to apply this knowledge for their health & well-being.

#3 Mindful care partners are highly attuned to their care partner and aware of their needs, as differentiated from their own.

Mindful Communication

• S.T.O.P.
• Begin by creating space within yourself
  – Slow down and take a brief, quiet moment
  – Pay attention to your breath
  – Notice how you are feeling
  – Recognizing any tension
• Notice your thoughts – without judgment
  – The future is unknown
  – Create room for listening, communication and possibility
  – Quiet expectations, assumptions or anticipated frustration

Mindful care partners are....

• dedicated to the practices which keep them well and are deeply curious about learning new ways of responding to their struggles.
• connected to friends and a peer network. They recognize this need early and become a model for other care partners.
• also learning through hardship & struggle how essential their self-care is to the well-being of their family and how this directly impacts the health and behavior of their care partner.
• intentional about their care partnering narrative and find meaning in caregiving. They know how to take in the good and understand how positive experiences are often distorted by stress responses and habit.

Laura Rice-Oeschger, LMSW / Michigan Alzheimer’s Disease 2017
Mindfulness and greater ease in providing dementia care

Mindfulness-based dementia care can empower you to be a better, more relaxed, and confident dementia caregiver in a number of ways:

1. **Bringing a calm, centered presence**
   With regular mindfulness practice, you will find that you are automatically more calm and centered, including during your care interactions. Calmness is one of the greatest gifts you can bring to the person in your care.

2. **Not being limited by expectations or wishes**
   Mindfulness teaches us to stay in the present moment, and to not let our mind wander in the past or the future. You will find yourself less likely to dwell in stressful mind states, and more open to what each new moment brings.

3. **‘Being’ vs. task-only driven**
   Many of the dementia behaviors arise when we rush to perform a task with the person without first checking where the person is in that moment. Mindfulness helps shift from a task-driven mode to a state of being with the other person. This results in the person feeling recognized and being more likely to respond positively.

4. **Responding, not reacting**
   In the heat of a difficult interaction, we run the risk of reacting and of making matters worse. Mindfulness practice trains us to naturally take the time to pause before making an appropriate response. This way we are more likely to de-escalate and transform interactions for the better.

5. **Being aware of the person**
   In our habitual rush to get things done, or out of habit, we may miss new cues about the person’s mental and physical state. This is especially important whenever verbal communication is impaired. With mindfulness, you will be more prone to noticing nonverbal signals.

6. **Being aware of the environment**
   Mindfulness teaches us to be more aware of our environment, which also happens to be that of the person with dementia. You will learn to use sensory awareness to better anticipate environmental stressors and to make appropriate changes in the person’s environment.

7. **Being fully attuned**
   Mindfulness practice helps us become comfortable with dropping below our habitual mode of discursive thinking and verbal communication. We learn different ways of connecting and signaling to the person that we are attuned to their present state. That skill becomes critical when the person with dementia is no longer able to speak or make sense when they talk.

[www.presencecareproject.com](http://www.presencecareproject.com)
RESEARCH SAMPLE

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction for Family Caregivers: A Randomized Controlled Trial
Robin R. Whitebird, PhD, MSW, MaryJo Kreitzer, PhD, RN, A. Lauren Crain, PhD, Beth A. Lewis, PhD, Leah R. Hanson, PhD, and Chris J. Enstad, BS The Gerontologist (2013) 53 (4): 676-686.

Meditation for Adults with Mild Cognitive Impairment: A Pilot Randomized Trial
Rebecca Erwin Wells MD, MPH, Catherine E. Kerr PhD, Jennifer Wolkin PhD, Michelle Dossett MD, PhD, Roger B. Davis ScD, Jacquelyn Walsh BS, Robert B. Wall MDiv, MSN, Jian Kong MD, MPH, Ted Kaptchuk, Daniel Press MD, Russell S. Phillips MD, Gloria Yeh MD, MPH. Journal of the American Geriatrics Society - Volume 61, Issue 4, April 2013

Meditation's impact on default mode network and hippocampus in mild cognitive impairment: A pilot study

A pilot study of yogic meditation for family dementia caregivers with depressive symptoms: effects on mental health, cognition, and telomerase activity

The Effects of Meditation on Perceived Stress and Related Indices of Psychological Status and Sympathetic Activation in Persons with Alzheimer’s Disease and Their Caregivers: A Pilot Study
K. E. Innes, T. K. Selfe, C. J. Brown, K. M. Rose, A. Thompson-Heisterman

Effects of an 8-Week Meditation Program on Mood and Anxiety in Patients with Memory Loss


Mindfulness Research Monthly
www.goAMRA.org

MBDC Research

Hospice of the Valley, Phoenix, Arizona: Study of MBDC effectiveness with family caregivers, part of Medicare funded research study. Fall 2014.


California State University, Stanislaus, School of Social Work: Study of MBDC effectiveness with mixed group of family caregivers and professional care providers, using tele-training technology; January 2014 – December 2014.

UCSF, Institute for Health and Aging & School of Nursing: 2-year study of the effectiveness of the Presence Care Mindfulness-Based Dementia Care training in long-term care settings; July 2013-June 2015; funded by California State Department of Public Health Alzheimer’s Disease Program.