

Workplace Wellness



You Are Here: Mindfulness for the Dental Hygienist

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As a dental hygienist, mother, and lifelong learner, I have benefitted greatly from the practice of mindfulness. I completed a certificate on the foundations of mindfulness and mindfulness meditation at the University of Toronto and learned how to practise daily and teach others. Despite my hectic schedule, I have learned to pause, pay attention, and prioritize self-care. I've written a children's book on mindfulness, and I provide experiential education for those who are interested in learning about the application of mindfulness. Based on my positive experience, my intention is to share how mindfulness can help my colleagues.

MINDFULNESS AND SELF-CARE FOR THE DENTAL HYGIENIST

According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, the founder of the eight-week Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, mindfulness is an awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, nonjudgmentally.¹ Research has revealed that mindfulness has helped nurses reduce stress levels and increase relaxation and self-care.²

As dental hygienists, we spend a lot of time accommodating our clients' needs before our own. This leads to stress and fatigue. We create goals and strive to meet them daily. A practice of mindfulness can help us let go of this goal-oriented stance and remember to pause and pay attention to the present moment.



A practice of mindfulness brings about self-acceptance, self-understanding, and self-care, and it can include a practice of meditation. Mindfulness is not just a meditation practice for when things are rough. Mindfulness is a way of living, a way of being.³

The health care model now incorporates the well-being of the clinician, and a practice of mindfulness is particularly important for health care professionals.⁴ Learning to manage stress and support self-care should be an important part of professional development.⁵

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*You Are Here: Mindfulness for the Dental Hygienist ...cont'd***ATTITUDINAL FOUNDATIONS**

The attitudinal foundations of mindfulness include a practice of non-judging, patience, and a beginner's mind.⁶ I describe these attitudes and share how you can apply and practice them daily.

*Non-judging*

Non-judging involves maintaining a neutral perspective on an experience. This includes pausing and paying attention. As you provide care for your client, are you anxious because you are behind schedule? Are you concerned about your client accepting care? Notice the path of a judging mind, whether it be good, bad or neutral. There is no need to focus on amending. Simply pay attention to how you feel, how you react, and continue with the care for your client. Let things flow.

*Patience*

With patience, you let your thoughts unfold in their own time. For example, when a client is overdue for care, you may feel rushed to complete treatment. A practice of mindfulness includes being patient with yourself. As you strive to fulfill expectations, you begin to lose focus on intent. There is no need to rush through your care to feel accomplished. With patience you can be sensitive not only to your client, but also to yourself. Acknowledge your independence and spend time educating your client on oral self-care.

*Beginner's Mind*

Mindfulness shifts your perspective to a beginner's mind. A beginner's mind is one that is willing to see everything as if for the first time. It allows you to be open to new opportunities and avoid getting stuck in one mindset and previous experiences. Each moment is unique and contains new possibilities. Try this: treat your client as if you are meeting them for the first time.

I understand that a practice of mindfulness might be new for you or that you may have tried it once and given up. I have been there. I must admit that when I first started, I found it difficult and it still can be to this day. However, when I pause, take a deep breath, and acknowledge my rushed thoughts, I become more present and less anxious. It takes time and that is OK. I have learned mindfulness helps support self-care, which is much needed not only as we work day-to-day, but also over the long term as we manage the ups and downs of our lives. I invite you to simply pause and pay attention to your breath. Be curious. There is no rush.

References

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