

Why You Need More Mindfulness During Stroke Recovery – Part 1

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For those who are unfamiliar with mindfulness, we'll begin with a simple definition:

Mindfulness is the intentional, nonjudgmental, focused awareness of this moment, centered on openness and acceptance of your inner experiences.

And if you'd like to know more, listen to Jon Kabat-Zinn (<http://www.mindful.org/jon-kabat-zinn-definition-mindfulness/>) – the founder of mindfulness-based stress reduction (<http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/stress-reduction/>) – explain what mindfulness is.

Now... what does this have to do with stroke recovery? See if you can relate to this:

Mindfulness in Rehab

Before stroke, you could exercise while also performing a bunch of other tasks, like listening to music, talking to your friend, and thinking about your next activity.

After stroke, you can only exercise while focusing on exercising. Can you relate to this? If so, try considering the possibility that you could be onto something here. Something really positive.

What if only focusing on exercise while you're exercising is the best thing that ever happened? (Seriously consider it.)

Mindfulness matters because when we aren't fully present with ourselves, we're not fully engaged with what we're doing. We're away, somewhere else with our thoughts, fluttering around in the past or future. We're not here – and *here* is the only place where healing happens.

To further drive this point, we'll dig into scientifically-proven reasons why mindfulness is good for you and your recovery.

Your Brain on Mindfulness

When we practice mindfulness repeatedly, our brain changes – in very good ways. In a general sense, the more we practice mindfulness, the better our brain becomes at being mindful. This is because **neuroplasticity** causes our brain to shape itself according to what we repeatedly focus on.

Therefore, the more we practice mindfulness, awareness, and presence – the better we get at being mindful, aware, and present.

To dig into the specifics, the left frontal activity of the brain is enhanced when we practice mindfulness-based stress reduction. This 'left-shift,' as they call it, causes the brain to move into an 'approach state.' **And in this approach state, we move toward, instead of away from, challenging situations.**

What This Means for You

Can you imagine what this means for stroke recovery?

By changing your brain with mindfulness, it will help you *lean in to rehab*. Instead of feeling overwhelmed or anxious about the challenges of rehab, you'll find an increasing capacity to take it head on. You will also learn how to approach these negative emotions with openness and acceptance instead of resistance, which will help them go away faster – leaving even more energy for your recovery.

Are you sold on the benefits of mindfulness for stroke recovery?

We hope so. And up next, you'll learn how to put this lifestyle into practice in Part 2: How to Be More Mindful During Stroke Recovery..