



Mindfulness and Recovery

By Renée Siegel

How does mindfulness work in recovery? First, let's define both.

Mindfulness comes from a Buddhist practice. It is a quality in Buddhism that describes a state of openness. To be mindful, one must remain in the present, not reminiscing about the past or speculating about the future. Being mindful is being aware. With the focus on the present, being open and accepting and being aware, one is said to be in a mindful state.

Recovery (from our addictions viewpoint) is the journey or process of improving the quality of one's existence while abstaining from harmful process addictions and/or substance use disorders.

The following are ten ways that mindfulness can be integrated into recovery. These ten steps are referred to as "The Ten Doorways to Mindfulness" from the book *Mindfulness and Recovery* by Thomas and Beverly Bien.

1. Return to the present moment. Ways to gently return your focus to the present may include paying attention to your present surroundings, reducing exposure to people, places and things that have been relapse triggers.
2. Consider your life as a story you are still writing. Remember that you are a work in progress. In recovery, you are not repeating past behaviors, you are engaging in new ones so the story is ever changing .
3. Use journaling to deepen awareness of your life story and open the door to spiritual awakening . The practice of releasing on paper old negative belief systems provides a space for new ones to emerge .
4. Practice meditation to become more accepting of yourself and your life. Meditation can come in a variety of practices but all include quieting the chatter of the mind which reduces anxiety.
5. Find ways to connect with the natural world. Whether you are outside near a mountain or beach, in fresh air, appreciating a child's innocence or petting an animal, the process of connection is an invitation to see ourselves as part of something greater than we are individually.



6. Cultivate healthy relationships to discourage addiction. Meeting new people in the fellowship or in new and healthier social pursuits where addiction is not part of daily life provides an opportunity to see other patterns of relating.
7. Explore dreams to expand your view of who you are beyond the limited point of view of your conscious, rational self. We all dream and many dreams provide clues to 'what it is we need to work on that will help us to heal.
8. Practice mindfulness at work. Mindfulness can and needs to be addressed in all areas of your life, including work. Be present to the tasks at hand.
9. Learn to hold and embrace difficult emotions to ensure successful recovery. Emotions may be difficult and uncomfortable, but numbing them or fighting them just gives them more power. One nice thing about negative emotions is that they will eventually change.
10. Practice, practice, practice. Don't give up on yourself.