



INHALE... EXHALE... REPEAT.

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It's been back to back evening shifts for the past few days. The Emergency Department by its very nature is busy, but this past week, it's reached another level. You've been having busy shifts, difficult patients, and bad sleep. Your coffee has gotten cold. There's a throbbing pulsation on the right side of your head that's threatening to become a full blown migraine and you can feel your nerves getting fried as you see your ED launch board. Your mind switches to reactionary mode. You see. You react. Reactionary mode - The downfall of our wellness as well as our clinical practice.

How can the Emergency Medicine physician overcome this? You learn to be and remain mindful.

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness (noun): The ability to be fully present, aware of our surroundings, actions and emotions, and not overly reactive to, or overwhelmed by our surroundings, allowing us to take in the present moment without judgement. Mindfulness enables a physician to respond, rather than react, to the stressful situation at hand.



BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS?



The medical field is known to have increased rates of burnout, depression, and even suicide in physicians. It is the detrimental effects of stress that tend to be the culprit. Uncontrolled stress is the "hidden killer"; it impacts our professional lives, personal relationships and eventually the qualities that make us the empathetic physicians we are supposed to be.

What mindfulness can create is a mental space in which you are able to choose your response to different situations. It offers a period of decision-making time, which allows you a brief moment to choose a reaction. You develop an awareness of your emotions and thoughts and prevent them from becoming out of control and creating distress.

Over time, you have better stress control, improved insight into your emotions, and an appreciation of the good things in your life. Once you master the art of being present and aware, without being judgmental or overwhelmed, the normal daily irritants of life or shifts become background noise. You are able to ignore beeping monitors, the angry patient, the difficult consult, or the overall organized chaos of the Emergency Department. As Emergency physicians we thrive on this chaos, this fast-paced life we live, but over time, it hurts us in ways we don't readily see. If we prescribe exercise to our patients for a healthier body, we must also give respect to the most crucial organ of our existence. Our mind.

So, **Inhale... Exhale... Repeat.**

HOW TO PRACTICE

Podcasts/Websites:

- [All It Takes is 10 Mindful Minutes](#) - TED Talk by Andy Puddicombe
- [Free Guided Meditations](#) - UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center (App also available)
- [EMcrit - Vipassana-meditation](#)
- [The Overwhelmed Brain](#) - a podcast on personal growth, with episodes on meditation and banishing negative thoughts

Recommended Apps

- Headspace
- Calm
- 10% Happier
- Sleep cycle

Recommended books

- Inhale, Exhale, Repeat: A Mindfulness Handbook for Every Part of Your Day by Emma Mills
- The Mindful Geek: Secular Meditation for Smart Skeptics, by Michael W Taft
- Insight Meditation, by Joseph Goldstein
- 10% Happier: How I Tamed the Voice in My Head, Reduced Stress Without Losing My Edge, and Found Self-Help that Actually Works — A True Story, by Dan Harris

