The Benefits of Mindfulness for Bipolar Disorder

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Practicing Mindfulness for Bipolar

Two months ago I got into a minor fender-bender. I wish I could say it was the other guy's fault, that I was the one sitting at a stoplight when some crazy person bumped into me. But it was the other way around. I was the one who was out of control, slamming on my brakes before crashing into the car in front of me.

The Need to Be More Mindful

I tried to offer a sincere apology to the other driver, but he was more concerned about the scratches on his car than with making nice with me. As I waited for the police I thought about how this incident had thrown off my whole day.

I had a full day of errands planned and now I would be delayed for hours. And then came the small, yet bold, note to self: Be more mindful! Unfortunately, it took six weeks before I re-read my note to self. At the time I didn't even know what mindfulness was or how it could be acquired; all I knew was I needed it desperately.

What Is Mindfulness?

A few computer searches later I learned that mindfulness is a philosophy rooted in one of the eightfold paths of Buddhism. I found many descriptions of mindfulness, but the following one stuck with me most:

Mindfulness is simply being aware of what is happening right now without wishing it were different. Enjoying the pleasant without holding on when it changes (which it will). Being with the unpleasant without fearing it will always be this way (which it won't).

With this new mantra I was on my way to conquering mindfulness; this simple, yet profound concept. My first stop was purchasing a book on mindfulness. Half an hour later I downloaded *The 21-Day Mindfulness Challenge* on my e-reader.

Beginning the Mindfulness Journey

I started the book with high hopes. I wrote in my journal how I hoped this mindset would help me in my daily battle to live a balanced life. It was so simple, yet so profound.

I was sure my life was going to change — I just didn't know how it would change. My hope was that I would be more organized and more together. I wanted my eating and sleeping habits to change. I wanted to be a better person. Each day of the challenge I saw my future self in all her glory.

Then I read a section of the book that encouraged me to let go of my expectations for the future and accept myself and my life as it is today, with all the flaws. That was certainly not what I wanted to hear. I wanted to gloss

over who I was today in the wanton expectation of my much better future self. But mindfulness is truly about embracing the moment, the here and now.

Lessons Learned

This sober realization reset my mindfulness trek. I made it through my first book and graduated on to my second mindfulness book. Here are some things I discovered along the way:

1. **There are many ways to practice mindfulness.** Some do daily meditation, others do a daily reading or special exercises to help them to be more mindful. It is important to choose an introduction to mindfulness that best suits your needs.
2. **The most important thing is to jump in and begin your practice; and once you begin, be patient with yourself.** At any moment most of us have the dozens of thoughts in our mind, racing around like race cars in the Indy 500. Slowing down and taking one thought at a time takes practice.
3. **Mindfulness means letting go of many of our thoughts about the past and the future and devoting our attention to the present moment.** Mindfulness means making a commitment to live in the moment.
4. **Although it seems that the sole devotion to the present moment leads to an unstructured and unorganized existence, the opposite is true.** This is because mindfulness also incorporates the very important practice of intention. The goal is to act mindfully and intentionally in the moment.

Mindfulness for Bipolar Disorder

Mindfulness offers many benefits for those suffering from bipolar disorder. Decluttering the mind is a stepping stone to improved mental health. In addition, mindfulness can lead to enhanced peace of mind, increased focus and better rest.

Mindfulness can keep your life in balance so you can weather the bipolar storms. I encourage you to take up your own mindfulness journey!