

**Be Brave.  
Make  
Space.**



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**Hi! I'm Coach  
Margie**  
I'm glad you're  
reading the Brave  
Space newsletter.  
My newsletter is  
written to share  
information and  
support.



### Upcoming Events

**January 1-31:** Follow me on Facebook, IG, and LinkedIn for daily video tips and benefits for navigating your Dry January—links below for my social accounts.

**February 1-29:** Fresh February registration has launched! [Register Here](#) (Virtual) **USE THE PROMO CODE SAVE10 FOR A 10% DISCOUNT!**

**Free Values-Based Boundaries Workshop:**  
Save the date! April 8-12, 2024 (Virtual)

*I've got some cleaning up to do today! I'm resending this newsletter because I put the wrong link to connect to the Fresh*

This week I am sharing how you can harness the power of neuroplasticity to increase your stress resilience.

Sounds a little woo-woo? I get it. When I started my journey to freedom from alcohol, I was introduced to lots of new terms, ideas, and scientific facts. Mindfulness sounded woo-woo. But then, I can't resist scientific facts. They drive me toward my goal. I need those facts to form new beliefs and habits. And yes, indeed, there is science to back up the value of mindfulness!

Let's face it. Life is busy. Parenting, work, hobbies, friends, problems, and pressure fill each day with more items on our to-do list than we can accomplish. **Who has time for mindfulness meditation?** But as these pressures erode sleep, increase anxiety, turn into depression, lead to inflammation, and tempt us to turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms, we might want to reconsider the benefits of a simple mindfulness practice.

### **Why We Get Stuck**

Being on autopilot and letting the default mode network of our brain dominate our thinking are two fundamental challenges that interfere with how we handle the pressures of life.

When we are on autopilot, we don't pay attention to what we are thinking and how our thinking connects to our emotions and behavior. So what DO we do? We react to life events and go from calm to irritated or anxious in a flash. When we are away from the pressures of our lives, our brain's default mode network triggers rumination and constructs unhelpful thoughts about the past and the future.

**95% of our thoughts each day come from our subconscious mind, where we ruminate constantly, bouncing back and forth between the past and the future.**

Mindfulness helps us increase the

**3. Mindfulness helps us stay connected to the present moment.**

Falling and staying asleep is often a challenge when we experience stressful periods of life. Our mind races back and forth between our regrets about the past and worries about the future, keeping us awake. During the day, our busy minds distract us from being present with the people we love and the work we need to accomplish. **A mindfulness practice helps harness our ability to shift and focus our attention** on our bodily sensations and regulate the emotional responses associated with those physical sensations.

**4. Mindfulness facilitates learning and memory.**

The gray matter of the memory areas of the brain generally decreases with age, impacting memory processes, emotional regulation, and perspective-taking. As a result, **our memory suffers as we get older, we become less flexible with change, and we find it difficult to appreciate the perspective of others.** Mindfulness has been demonstrated to increase the size of the hippocampus, which leads to improved learning, memory, and stress management.

**5. Mindfulness helps with brain healing and pain management.**

Mindfulness practices greatly enhance neuroplasticity. Recovery from brain injury requires healing damaged areas of the brain and using other areas to recover lost functioning. **Mindfulness can improve emotional regulation and mental fatigue and help regulate pain.**

### **How To Get Started**

If you are ready to try mindfulness, there are many learning options. Some will find it easier to follow along by listening to instructions that guide your attention. If that is you, consider following a short, guided meditation using the body scan exercise.

For those who want to sit quietly and learn to increase their awareness through focused concentration, follow these steps with the "clouds in the sky" exercise:

awareness of our thoughts, feelings, physical sensations, and behaviors, but it also helps us have **more control over how we respond to life pressures**. In other words, mindfulness trains our brain to bring thoughts into the present, conscious mind. **Mindfulness changes the resting state of the brain to be less judgmental, fearful, and anxious, reducing the impact of the default mode network and creating a sense of well-being.**

Here are five ways mindfulness helps rewire the brain, giving us **better control over how we respond to stress, handle difficult emotions, manage pain, and adapt to change.**

### 1. Mindfulness improves our brain chemistry.

Research suggests that regular mindfulness practices help the brain increase levels of **GABA**, which helps us stay calm; **dopamine**, the pleasure and reward neurotransmitter; and **serotonin**, which helps us experience positive emotions.

### 2. Mindfulness changes our fear and stress response.

When we take in sensory information about a possible threat, the **amygdala** is the first brain structure to process that information. The amygdala evaluates images and sounds; if it detects a threat, it passes on the information to the **hippocampus**, which activates the body to prepare for a threat. **With regular mindfulness practice, the size of the amygdala shrinks. A smaller amygdala is correlated with a reduced fear response, increased calmness, better management of anxiety, and a feeling of well-being.**

- Sit comfortably, close your eyes, and direct your attention to your breath.
- Notice the gentle movement of your stomach as you breathe.
- As you breathe quietly, thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations will come and go like clouds passing in an open blue sky.
- Be open and curious about what comes and goes from your awareness.
- Try to suspend judgment and evaluation of what you experience.
- Accept what you experience without wishing things to be different or trying to make them different.
- Hold your thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations with compassion and kindness.

**You will notice that even with much effort, your mind will still be busy. Have compassion for yourself as you notice where your mind wanders.** Gently bring it back and focus your attention once again. In no time, you will soon see that your thoughts and emotions will come and go, just like the breaths you take from moment to moment. **Start practicing five minutes twice a day and increase the length of your practice sessions week by week—it won't be long before you look forward to each practice and notice the changes in how you handle the pressures of life.**

### Resources:

[Free Mindfulness Project](#)  
[Stanford University Health Library](#)  
[Sharon Salzberg Metta Meditations](#)

### Popular Apps:

Insight Timer  
Calm  
Headspace

I hope you find this helpful! Please let me know. ☐

*Margie*

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