

Mindfulness in the Workplace

Written by Cheyenne Autumn, Managing Director Onsite Strategies, UnitedHealthcare of Arizona

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In the workplace, a modest amount of stress can be normal. But sustained levels of stress can be harmful and may lead to numerous health issues, affect professional and family relationships, and contribute to poor work performance. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](#)), “40 percent of workers say that their jobs are very stressful, and more than 26 percent say they are ‘often burned out or stressed’ by their work.”

According to [United Health Foundation's most recent America's Health Rankings](#), people living in Arizona experience between 3.5 and 4.3 poor mental health days each month. That's the number of days in which an adult reports that their overall mental health was not good and during which they may not be able to fully participate in work or other activities.

Balancing work, family life, and financial and health concerns may be taxing for many employees; however, according to a recent [UnitedHealthcare survey](#), almost 90 percent of employees said meditation, or mindfulness, has a positive impact on a person's overall health and well-being, including 41 percent who believe such activities can have a “significant impact.”

Employers that foster a workplace culture that prioritizes well-being, including mindfulness programs, can help their employees cope with challenging times whether at work or at home that may lower stress, reduce health risks, improve health decisions and focus, and sense of well-being.



ABC's of Mindfulness

“Mindfulness” is the practice of being fully present in each moment with an open and curious attitude. To some, mindfulness is a hard topic to grasp, but the goal of mindfulness can be very simple. Just imagine a workplace filled with positive energy, where working relationships and communications are optimized, and challenging situations and distractions give way to focus and self-awareness. These are some of the goals of mindfulness programs.

With practice, mindfulness may free employees of habitual patterns of thinking, judging, feeling and acting, and may help them perform better, ignore distractions, and make better decisions throughout the day.

For example, the following “mindful breaths” exercise may be helpful, especially when noticing that twinge of tightness, anxiety or stress many of us experience during the day:

- *Step 1: Bring awareness to your body and the sense of the natural breath in the body.*
- *Step 2: Inhale through the nose, and exhale either through the nostrils or through the mouth as if breathing out through a straw.*
- *Step 3: Repeat the inhale, and then the exhale. Notice the air entering the body, the pause after the in-breath, and the air leaving the body on the outbreath.*
- *Step 4: One more time – slowly inhaling, and then slowly exhaling.*

Mindfulness can be practiced while sitting in a quiet place, while walking, or even during normal workplace activities, such as attending a meeting or replying to an e-mail. When distractions come into mind, practicing this technique may help people let those distractions go and come back to the present moment.

Employees are not the only ones who may benefit from a mindfulness program. Employers also may benefit by experiencing more productivity,

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with an enhanced sense of culture and connectedness that can drive more creativity and innovation while reducing absenteeism, burnout and turnover.

Following a solid body of research by universities and institutions, mindfulness programs are now offered by some health plans, including UnitedHealthcare, and medical centers, hospitals, schools and businesses.

For more information about employee well-being programs, visit [UHC.com](https://www.uhc.com).