

## HEALTHY LIVING IN COMMUNITY

*Mindfulness is a tool to help manage chronic disease*

“Mindfulness.” It’s become a popular term. But what is mindfulness, where did it come from, and how can it benefit people in our community?

“Mindfulness means paying attention to the immediate here and now, moment by moment,” says Marilyn McArthur, a local mindfulness teacher. “Anyone of any age who has voluntary control of their mind can learn to improve their attention with practice. Marvelously, the bit of effort it takes to be mindful actually relaxes tensions, rather than add to them.”

Originating from a Buddhist term, “sati,” the practice of mindfulness in the West entered our culture over the last century. One of the people who helped to popularize mindfulness did it right here in Massachusetts. In 1979, Jon Kabat-Zinn created the Stress Reduction Clinic, and later the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Healthcare, and Society, at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. The son of a biomedical scientist and a painter, Kabat Zinn had gone to school for molecular biology, earning a PhD from MIT in 1971, while also studying yoga and Buddhist practices. He took what he learned from Buddhism about meditation and analyzed it with a scientific approach, researching and reframing it as a tool for health and wellbeing.

Marilyn is a teacher of Kabat-Zinn’s Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, and she says that she values “sharing its benefits with others.” When she first turned to mindfulness, however, it was as a way to help cope with a frightening and stressful time in her own life.

“On my 40th birthday, I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS),” says Marilyn. “I was stressed and also frightened, because I had three little children at home. A friend brought me a little book called *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, and I sensed it was the medicine I needed.”

Mindfulness has been shown to have a positive effect on the quality of life of people living with chronic illnesses like MS, helping to increase relaxation and relieve the depression and psychological stress that can accompany a diagnosis. More specifically, MBSR has been tested for anxiety disorders, chronic pain, insomnia, substance abuse disorder, and other health problems.

When Marilyn first began to practice mindfulness, she says, “Mindful breathing helped me unwind and fall asleep. I was so happy to have a tool to overcome insomnia and rebuild my health.” Over time, her mindfulness practice helped to calm her nerves. “Daily practice helps regulate a jumpy nervous system and reduce stress.”



*Marilyn McArthur is a local mindfulness teacher.*

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Marilyn brought mindfulness to the Healthy Living Program at LifePath by way of a group for alumni of the program’s workshops. “[Healthy Living Program Manager] Andi Waisman invited me to present at the monthly alumni group, a free support action group for anyone who has completed any of the workshops,” says Marilyn. The alumni meetings take place at the new Greenfield Senior Center on the first Thursday of the month at 2 p.m.

Marilyn enjoyed her experience and decided to become trained as a volunteer Healthy Living workshop co-leader. “I retired this year from my work as a museum education consultant, and now it was time to go in this direction,” says Marilyn. “I especially like working on a team and co-teaching.”

She decided to train to co-lead two different workshops: Matter of Balance and Chronic Disease Self-Management (CDSM). “Matter of Balance is good for me, as it addresses my own challenges to stay on my feet and walk as well as I can. Now I can share all its good recommendations. CDSM investigates the whole range of challenges of living with a chronic condition. It’s good to have the support of a group when you are trying to make lifestyle changes.”

Like mindfulness, these workshops are backed up by scientific research, and mindfulness practices may be taught along with a host of other strategies. “Using Your Mind to Manage Symptoms” is one of the tools in the CDSM workbook, encompassing techniques such as distraction, spirituality, writing, and relaxation body scan, a form of mindfulness meditation.

Distraction is common in our modern society. You can distract yourself in many ways: with technology, such as watching television, browsing the internet, or using social media; by socializing, reading, listening to music. While you could call mindfulness “a distraction from the anxiety and worry associated with chronic illness, and modern life in general,” says Marilyn, “practicing mindfulness, for example with the body scan, is an exercise in not being distracted from the here and now. To the contrary, mindfulness is very curious about what is happening right here, right now.”

As Marilyn said, although mindfulness is about paying attention to what is happening in the moment, it is not about focusing on the pain you are feeling or what has you worried. Instead, you leave your inner thoughts behind to focus intentionally on what you are doing, even if all that you are focusing on is your own breath. If your attention slips away, you observe where it went without judgement, and invite your thoughts back to where you’ve intended to focus them.

*(continued on page 2)*

## SHINE: SERVING THE HEALTH INSURANCE NEEDS OF EVERYONE

*Medicare Open Enrollment is open and ends on December 7*

by Lorraine York-Edberg, Western Mass. Regional SHINE Program Director



If you have a Medicare, sometime during the month of September you should have received important information known as an Annual Notice of Change from your Prescription Drug Plan or your Medicare Advantage Plan HMO (Health Maintenance Organization) or PPO (Preferred Provider Organization). The mailing explains any changes to your plan in the coming year regarding premiums, drug coverage changes (formulary), providers, and restrictions. It is **very important** to review the information to make sure the plan still works for you.

Starting October 15 through December 7, you can join, drop, or change your insurance, and the new coverage will begin on January 1, 2019. I like to call this time of year “Your Annual Insurance Checkup,” because it is a time when you can evaluate your current plan and decide if you want to make changes. If your current plan continues to meet your needs, then you may want to keep it. It is also a time when you may want to shop around for a new plan to help you save money, decrease or increase coverage.

Important things to consider when reviewing your plan changes are:

Does it still cover all your medications?

Are there any restrictions on your medication like quantity limits, prior authorization or step therapy that would make it difficult to access your needed medications?

Did you get a letter from your Medicare Prescription Drug Plan that your plan is changing or is no longer available in Massachusetts?

Have you been reassigned to a new plan? If so, contact the new plan to assure it will cover your current medications. If not, you should join a new plan before December 7, 2018, to access the medications you need without any problems.

Would you like to join a Medicare Prescription Drug Plan or Medicare Advantage Prescription Plan? Because [JR1] you’ve never joined previously, you can do it during this time.

**Review and save all letters from your plan!**

During the Medicare Open Enrollment (**October 15 - December 7**), you will have an opportunity to **CHANGE** your coverage for next year. You can decide to stay in Original Medicare or join a Medicare Advantage Plan. If you are already in a Medicare Advantage Plan, you can use the Open Enrollment to switch back to Original Medicare with a Medicare Prescription Drug Plan. State-certified SHINE (Medicare) counselors can help you understand your plan changes, as well as other options you may have. **Call early to get a SHINE appointment (1-800-498-4232) during Open Enrollment!**

**Ways to get the help you need:**

- Visit [www.medicare.gov/find-a-plan](http://www.medicare.gov/find-a-plan) to use the Medicare Plan Finder.
- Look at your most recent “Medicare and You” handbook to see plans in your area; 2019 books will be mailed late September.
- Call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) and say, “Agent.” Help is available 24 hours a day, including weekends.
- Contact your local SHINE Program.
- Attend a local presentation regarding the annual Open Enrollment period.

*The SHINE program, Serving the Health Insurance Needs of Everyone, provides confidential, and unbiased health insurance counseling for Medicare beneficiaries. This is a free service, though contributions are welcome and will go a long way to help support this vital program. For further assistance with any Medicare issue, you can make a SHINE appointment. To reach a trained and certified counselor in your area, contact the regional office at 1-800-498-4232 or 413-773-5555, or contact your local council on aging.*

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“It begins by making friends with the breath,” says Marilyn. “Simply to pause and pay attention to the sensations of breathing, in a non-judgmental and curious way, serves to shift body and mind into a very welcome relaxation mode. This reduces unnecessary stress and its harmful effects. We are mindful when we pay attention to the present moment, whatever we are doing: mindful eating savors each morsel, instead of wolfing down food; mindful walking slows us down and puts our brains in the bottom of our shoes, so to speak, instead of careening headlong through the day.”

If you are interested in learning more about mindfulness, you can read about it online, find free resources from your local library, or take a class. “Mindfulness-based stress reduction is typically taught in an eight-week course that not everyone can afford,” says Marilyn. “Alternatively, the idea of community mindfulness is to

offer regularly scheduled sessions of guided instruction free of charge or by donation, so people can acquire these skills at their own pace. I am beginning to do this at the Amherst Senior Center and the Greenfield Senior Center.”

You can connect with Marilyn on Facebook; her page is called “Mindfulness in the Slow Lane.” You can also email her at [marilyn.mcarthur@gmail.com](mailto:marilyn.mcarthur@gmail.com) or call 413-687-5623 with questions or suggestions about forming a community mindfulness group.

To learn more about the Healthy Living Program at LifePath, enroll in a workshop, or become a volunteer leader, visit [LifePathMA.org/events/healthy-living-workshops](http://LifePathMA.org/events/healthy-living-workshops) or call 413-773-5555 or 978-544-2259.

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