



**EXPLAIN THIS »**

Answering your burning questions

# Q: HOW CAN I CUT STRESS AND INCREASE FOCUS?

**H**ave you ever walked into the kitchen only to realize you don't remember why you're there in the first place? Or forgotten to include the attachment on an important email? Then you could benefit from practicing mindfulness meditation, says Cynthia O'Connell, a specialist professor in Monmouth's School of Education.

At its core, mindfulness is noticing what's happening in the present moment. "You can be mindful without practicing meditation," says O'Connell—by single-tasking rather than multi-tasking, for example. "The practice of mindfulness meditation, however, is setting aside time each day, or a few times a day, to concentrate on being present."

Anyone can benefit from it. According to the American Psychological Association, mindfulness meditation is linked to reducing negative thoughts, cutting stress, boosting memory, increasing focus, and other health benefits. How does one do it? It's simple, says O'Connell.

First, sit or recline in a comfortable position. Then, concentrate on your breathing. "Breathe in and out slowly through your nose,"

says O'Connell. "As thoughts come in, acknowledge that thought and let it float by like a cloud in the sky. You can revisit that thought later."

Some beginners might find that meditation comes naturally to them; others can benefit from the help of a guided meditation mobile app. O'Connell also advises beginners to put a sticky note on their computer monitor, steering wheel, or cell phone to remind them to practice.

So how does concentrating on your breathing a few minutes each day translate to being more mindful in day-to-day life? "It helps you remember to 'STOP,'" says O'Connell, which is an acronym she recommends for beginners. Whenever you find yourself on autopilot, remember to: Stop

and take stock of where you are; Take a breath; Observe what's happening around you; Proceed forward. Before long, mindfulness will filter into your life.

If you already practice mindfulness meditation and want to take your practice to the next level, try a few creative exercises: eat silently and notice your food, or take an entire minute to eat a piece of chocolate. "See what it tastes like; notice the sensations," says O'Connell.

The most important thing is to *keep practicing*. "Make it part of your daily routine just like eating, drinking water, and brushing your teeth," says O'Connell. "In order to reap the benefits, it has to be a daily effort—even if it's just two minutes."

—Melissa Kvidahl

## THE 10-SECOND BONUS QUESTION

### DO I NEED A MANTRA?

The short answer? No. A component of Transcendental Meditation, the mantra is intended to let the mind settle and, ultimately, transcend thought entirely. This kind of meditation is a totally different approach from being mindful, which instead encourages practitioners to not only have thoughts, but to focus them on the present moment.

To ask a question of our faculty experts, email [magazine@monmouth.edu](mailto:magazine@monmouth.edu) or mail Explain This, Monmouth magazine, Alumni House, 400 Cedar Ave., West Long Branch, NJ 07764.



## CROWDSOURCING HISTORY

JOSEPH P. VEIT WAS JUST 25 years old in 1917, when he was drafted to fight in World War I. Hailing from the Vailsburg section of Newark, a largely German-American and Jewish community, he was sent to fight on the Western Front as part of the 78th Infantry ("Lightning") Division, 312th Regiment. His grandson, Richard Veit, chair of Monmouth's History and Anthropology Department, says his grandfather shared many memories of the war with him.

"One of his stories was about shooting down a German biplane with his machine gun team," says Richard. "He saved a piece of the

cloth covering from the plane after it crashed. He also claimed that the food in the trenches was supplied by the British and consisted largely of mutton, which was, in his estimation, pretty awful."

Following Joseph's death, Richard inherited a trunk that had belonged to his grandfather. Inside it he discovered a treasure trove of memorabilia from the war. Some of the items, including a needlepoint and welcome home banner (pictured), had belonged to Joseph. Others were keepsakes given to him by his comrades. Joseph collected the items well into his 80s, as he was one of the last survivors of the regiment.

The WWI exhibit spans two floors in the Monmouth University library and runs through the end of the year. Admission is free.

These artifacts, along with about 150 others, are currently on display in the Monmouth University Library as part of an exhibit marking the centennial of the United States' entry into WWI. The items were crowdsourced from a dozen people, including many in the Monmouth community, by Specialist Professor of Public History Melissa Ziobro, whose experiential Museum and Archives Management Basics class curated and developed the displays, which include various memorabilia from British, American, and German troops.

—Breanne McCarthy