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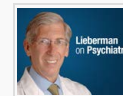
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# Mindfulness Training May Help Focus Attention

Megan Brooks

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Mindfulness training may help college students tame a wandering mind, new research hints.

University of Miami students who participated in brief mindfulness training (MT) during an academic semester said they felt more "on task" after the training period – a feeling backed up by an objective test of mind wandering.

The researchers believe brief MT should be studied further in academic settings for its ability to help college students focus on their work.

The study was [published online](#) January 6 in *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*.

A wandering mind can interfere with learning and academic success, and some research suggests that MT may help, Amishi P. Jha, PhD, Department of Psychology, University of Miami, Florida, and colleagues note.

MT is a form of brain training that teaches individuals to focus their attention on the present without conceptual elaboration or reactivity.

Dr. Jha and colleagues tested the efficacy of a short-form MT program to reduce mind wandering and improve working memory among college students.

Fifty-eight healthy students on the University of Miami campus participated; 30 were assigned to MT (7 hours during 7 academic weeks), and 18 were assigned to a wait-list control group.

Each week, MT participants attended a 20-minute instructor-led session that was appended to an introductory seminar offered to psychology majors in their first semester.

The MT program was modeled after the core practices and concepts of mindfulness-based stress reduction. The instructor taught basic mindfulness concepts, including cultivating focus and staying on task, acknowledging doubt and judgment, stress reduction, and integrating mindfulness into everyday life.

The sessions also included mindfulness practice and discussion of challenges arising during the academic semester. Each session closed with a 5- to 10-minute practice session led by the instructor.

Dr. Jha and colleagues found that compared with control students, those who engaged in MT had higher task accuracy on the sustained attention to response task (SART), a well-validated neuropsychological assessment tool designed to elicit mind wandering.

Subjectively, the MT students also reported being more "on task" after the 7-week MT training.

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Contrary to some prior studies, MT did not appear to have any benefit on memory in this study; neither of the 2 working memory tasks (operation span and delayed-recognition with distractors) showed any performance changes over time or group difference.

It is possible that the MT program was too brief to have an impact on working memory, the investigators say. They note that several of the studies reporting working memory benefits following MT included more intensive MT interventions with many more hours of course meetings and required practice time.

They note that additional studies with larger numbers of students and active comparison controls are needed to confirm that MT curbs mind wandering and to determine whether and how mind wandering relates to psychological health and academic achievement in student populations.


"While preliminary, these results do suggest that MT may be a practical route by which to tame a wandering attention and its further consideration in the educational context is warranted," they conclude.

MT has shown promise in several areas, as reported by *Medscape Medical News*, including [reducing opioid misuse](#) in cancer patients, [curbing depression and stress](#) in children, and [reducing symptoms](#) of posttraumatic stress disorder in combat veterans.

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