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Mindfulness Interrupts Dwelling on Negative Thoughts

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In the Spring of 2025, Ralph (not his real name), 72, saw the poster about Suicide Prevention through Mindfulness Training in the Psychiatric Assessment Unit at the Health Sciences Centre in St. John's. He had been struggling with his mental health, and a psychiatrist diagnosed him with Borderline Personality Disorder.

Mindfulness is a practice that develops attention, awareness, non-judgment, responding instead of reacting, and clear seeing.

"I've spent a lot of time with my emotions out of control," Ralph says, "ruminating (dwelling on negative thoughts), and feeling hopeless. I didn't have a way to get better. I didn't know what to do with myself. That's what prompted me to seek out the Mindfulness."

Ralph enrolled in the eight-week program.

"Mindfulness is one tool in my toolbox," he says, looking back. "When I'm alone, it gives me a practice that I can do: just feel peaceful, quiet the mind, be aware of what's happening, and just feel good about that."

"What the group taught me was how to meditate and be mindful, and how to deal with stress that way. The biggest take-away is that I'm OK, and my thoughts are not who I am; they're just thoughts. I can just look at them in that way, and not let them have too much control."

After completing the program, Ralph found it "very, very helpful", but then he stopped doing the mindfulness practice, which he had been doing most days.

"Where I wasn't practicing," Ralph recalls, "my old issues came back."

When he found out about another group being offered, he registered again. Since he had gotten out of the habit of regular practice, the rumination had come back. He figured a refresher would help.

"What it taught me was not to be ruminating so much. It's about being present, being in the now."

Three months after the completion of the second group, Ralph is practicing mindfulness daily—usually first thing in the morning. Some days, he'll add a second session later in the day.

Recognizing mind-wandering and coming back to the breath is the heart of the practice. Asked if he thinks this helps him deal with rumination, he says, "Yes, definitely because that puts me in a state of mind where I'm not ruminating, and then during the day I can take time in my mind to just stop and be in the present moment.

"This would help if somebody has suicidal thoughts," he adds. "Sometimes, they grab hold and it seems like it's all they can think about."

Ralph has consistently attended Monday Night Meditation—a weekly session of mindfulness practice that is open to the public. "It keeps me on track," he says. "It reinforces the tone of the practice." He hasn't missed a session since the second group completed.

Over the years, rumination has been a big obstacle for Ralph. "The more you are into mindfulness, the less you are ruminating--the less you're thinking in a negative tone. You're seeing things as they are."

Reflecting on the upcoming group for seniors, Ralph noted how busy younger people are. When seniors retire, "all that is taken away. They're left with a big chunk of time and they wonder what they're going to do with it." He added that meditation can help them with their boredom, look at things in a different way, and get them in touch with other like-minded folks. "So I think mindfulness is a good thing for seniors," he says.
