

Mindfulness  
For Everyday Living  
YMCA.  
1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays  
13:30 – 15:30



Mindfulness is not a magic fix. It requires a sense of curiosity, realistic expectations, an ongoing commitment and discipline.  
Willim Kuyken, PhD.

**Another question this week; Do you think understanding the concept of the Tunnel of Awareness could assist you from falling into the concept of the Funnel of Exhaustion?**

**What is the Tunnel of Awareness?** - In his 1890 book *The Principles of Psychology*, William James describes what in Mindfulness is known as The Tunnel of Awareness, as a continuous “stream of consciousness” rather than separate thoughts. He explained how attention narrows experience into a selective “field” of awareness. **Jon Kabat-Zinn** describes the Awareness Tunnel, as moving from narrow, reactive attention into spacious- present moment awareness.

You could simply interpret the “tunnel of awareness” as the ordinary mind narrows experience into thoughts, worries, and self-stories. Mindfulness relaxes the tunnel, so awareness becomes wider, calmer, and more connected to our direct experiences.

## THE TUNNEL OF AWARENESS

Mindfulness is not about getting rid of thoughts.  
It's about widening the lens, then gently narrowing it  
to what matters most—right now.

**WIDE AWARENESS**  
Open to everything  
Sounds, sights, thoughts, feelings,  
memories, worries, plans...

**NARROWING**  
Bringing attention  
to the present

**MINDFULNESS**  
Choosing where  
to focus

**DISTRACTIONS**  
Pulling attention outward

- 🔊 Sounds
- 👁️ Sights
- 💭 Thoughts
- ❤️ Emotions
- 📅 Plans
- 🕒 Memories
- ❓ Worries

Not bad.  
Just not the focus  
right now.

**THE PRESENT MOMENT**  
Anchor attention here  
Breath. Body. Senses.  
This moment, as it is.

Notice widely. Choose wisely. Return gently. ❤️

- 🎯 Intention
- 🌊 Breath
- 🧍 Body
- 👂 Sounds (chosen)
- 👁️ Sights (chosen)
- ❤️ Feelings (observed  
with kindness)

At the back of the tunnel everything is competing for our attention.

- Noises
- Worries
- Memories
- Plans
- Emotions
- Random thoughts.

The bright opening at the front of the tunnel represents

- Calm
- Being present
- Focusing gently on what is happening

These things are not “bad.”  
They are simply things that pull us away from the present moment.

The person sitting in the tunnel is practising mindfulness meditation by:

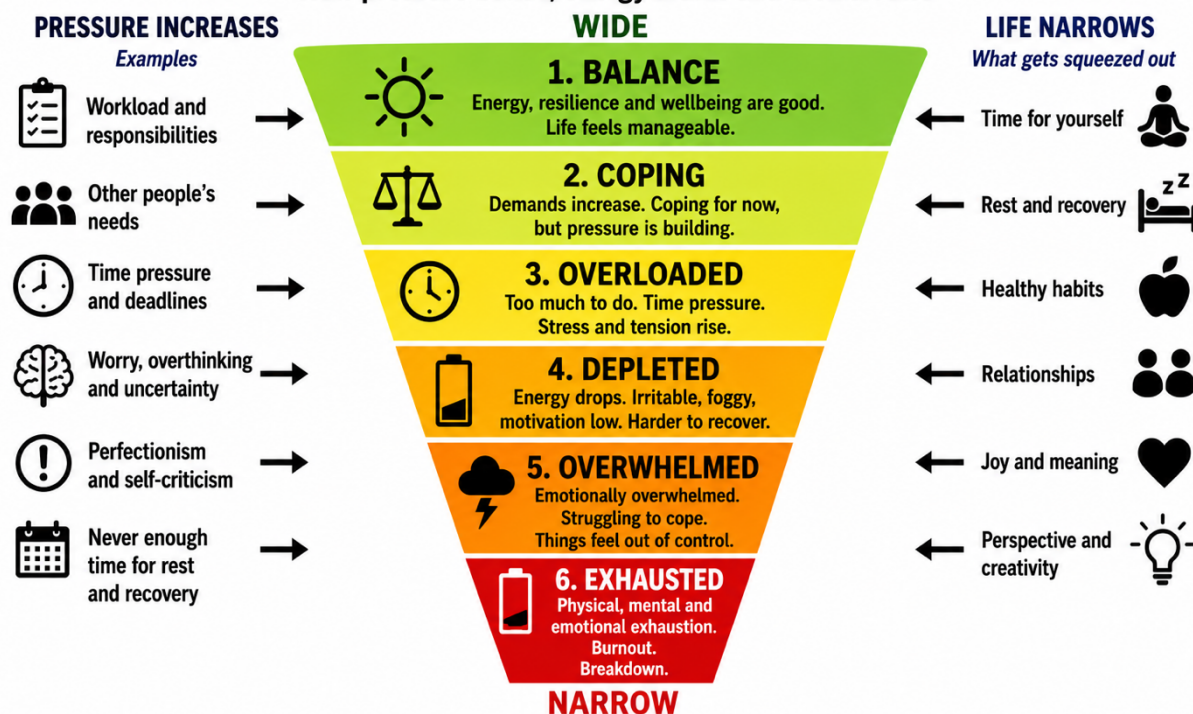
- Noticing distractions
- Not fighting them
- Calmly bringing attention back to one thing, such as the breath 🌿

The goal of mindful meditation and the “tunnel of awareness” is not to empty the mind, it’s more about making awareness a choice and continually returning kindly to the present moment.

The “**Exhaustion Funnel**” describes the gradual narrowing of a person’s energy, resilience and wellbeing under ongoing stress and pressure. The concept originated with clinical psychologist Marie Åsberg and colleagues studying burnout. As demands increase and recovery decreases, people move from balance towards depletion, overwhelm and eventual emotional, mental and physical exhaustion. **Mindfulness** helps us notice early signs of stress, overload and depletion. By paying attention kindly and intentionally, we can pause, restore balance, set boundaries and prevent ourselves sliding further into exhaustion.

# THE EXHAUSTION FUNNEL

How pressure builds, energy drains and life narrows



### How we use this in Mindfulness.

Mindfulness helps us to notice early signs of stress, overload and depletion. By paying attention kindly and intentionally, we can pause, restore balance, set boundaries and prevent ourselves from sliding further into exhaustion by noticing the early warning signs.

### Awareness creates choice.

Small steps now prevent big consequences later.

In their book *Mindfulness, a practical guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World*, Professor Mark Williams and Dr Danny Penman, explain that people are very easily drawn into the exhaustion funnel because the mind naturally shifts into “doing mode.” We become focused on solving problems, meeting demands and pushing ourselves forward, often ignoring signs of stress or tiredness. Gradually, we stop noticing what our body and mind need. They suggest this happens quietly and automatically. Small pressures accumulate, we lose time for rest and recovery, and life begins to narrow.

Mindfulness helps interrupt this process by bringing us back into awareness of the present moment — noticing tension, fatigue, emotions and habits before we become overwhelmed.

The link between the two for me comes naturally almost like two connected journeys of attention. **The Tunnel of Awareness** teaches us to notice where our attention is going. **The Exhaustion Funnel** shows us what can happen when life continually pulls our attention and energy without us allowing ourselves enough recovery time, possibly because we are sometimes so overwhelmed we forget to pay attention to the present moment?

Mindfulness is not escaping life; it helps us to notice life more clearly – before exhaustion takes over. The goal is not to achieve perfect calm or never feeling stressed. The goal is learning to notice earlier, respond kindly, and care for ourselves before exhaustion deepens.

So, what are your thoughts, can understanding the Tunnel stop you from falling into the Funnel?