

weighing 300 pounds also played a major role in her health crisis.

“Prior to my heart attack, I was an emotional eater,” says Perez, now 48. “Food became my crutch. Retrospectively, I see how much I didn’t care what I ate or notice how I was feeling when I was eating.”

Perez discovered mindfulness just after her heart attack. Using mindfulness helped her notice the taste and texture of what she was eating. She began differentiating between true physical hunger and eating to fill an emotional void.

“I’m able not to gorge or say, ‘There’s food here—let me eat it,’” she says.

“I’ve dropped about 70 pounds. I’m not

in tip-top shape yet, but I’m more consciously aware of what I’m eating, making sure it’s more for nourishment and not because I’m feeling bored or for other reasons.”

Along with mindfulness, Perez also learned—and now teaches—laughter yoga, a mind-body exercise involving voluntary laughter. Group laughter sessions are amazingly potent at keeping people in the moment, says Perez.

“When you’re laughing,” she explains, “you’re not thinking about the past or the future. You really are in the present.”

– RICHARD S. ELLIS –

[‘The suffering has disappeared’](#)

When chronic, blinding headaches began plaguing Richard S. Ellis in 2000, he responded with “anger, denial and extensive medication.” Even medication did not totally relieve the relentless pain, which began to suck all the pleasure from his life and work as a professor of mathematics and Judaic studies at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst.

Then in 2003, Ellis took a class in mindfulness-based stress reduction that radically changed how he dealt with his chronic pain.

“My mindfulness meditation is rather straightforward. It focuses on the breath. When a distraction comes, I observe it

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When you’re laughing, you’re not thinking about the past or the future. You really are in the present.”

– DIANA PEREZ



and let it go,” he says. “The main thing it does is to allow me to observe the pain rather than react to it.”

Lest this technique sound easy, Ellis admits, “it took years before I was able to come to terms with this.”

During this time, he continued to try different drug therapies to eradicate his headaches, but his doctors never found a cure or cause for his pain.

Ellis’ experiences motivated him to write the memoir, *Blinding Pain, Simple Truth: Changing Your Life Through Buddhist Meditation* (Rainbow Books Inc., 2011).

He is quick to point out that mindfulness didn’t cure his pain, though it has significantly diminished it both physically and emotionally.

“Although the pain continues, the intensity is greatly reduced and the suffering has disappeared,” Ellis says. “My pain is now totally manageable.” ■



SURPRISING SETTINGS FOR MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness has been embraced by the corporate world for its health benefits, as well as a way to encourage creativity and original thinking. Mindfulness techniques are even being taught in some unexpected settings.

- The U.S. Marine Corps has been testing brain-calming exercises that are based on mindfulness and other forms of meditation. It hopes these techniques will improve troops’ ability to handle high-stress situations and to recover more quickly afterward. Experiment results will be released later this year.
- Massachusetts correctional facilities offered mindfulness-based stress reduction courses to 1,350 drug-unit inmates in a 2007 study. Many showed significant improvements in self-reported measures of hostility, self-esteem and mood disturbance.