

What Are You Feeding Your Mind?

5/11/23

Lisa here. I hope last week's blog helped you add more mindfulness practice to your life. This week, we're again focusing on consumption, but this time we're talking about consumption of content instead of food. Every day, we're bombarded with content, whether it's from TV, our phones, or other people. Although we don't have a say in all the content that's out there, we can control a lot of what we take in. We can even select content that boosts or creates a certain mood.

Our moods are responsive to our context- that includes the media content we consume. Music, shows, movies, podcasts, video games, art. When we engage with particular content at a particular time, it can evoke an emotional response. I'm sure you've experienced this at some point in your life. Have you ever chosen a song or a movie based on your mood? For example, maybe you felt like you needed a good cry, or you were feeling down & you chose a sad movie or that one song that always makes you cry.



Sometimes we don't realize the ways certain content affects us. Have you ever noticed your mood shift after you have been watching or listening to something for a while? I'm a big fan of podcasts, but there are some that, although I enjoy the content, I can't listen to very often because they worsen my mood. There are others that are my go-to mood boosters. The tricky part here is that we often are unaware of the effect of content on our mood right away because the shift is gradual. Those podcasts that worsen my mood are not negative. They're not sharing upsetting content. But there's something about them that makes me feel worse when I listen for too long. So, those get removed from the rotation.

Here's where mindfulness comes in. When we are mindful of our moods in general, we are also more mindful of changes in our mood. Pay attention to how the content you take in affects your mood, either positively or negatively. Your emotional response to content may be pretty straightforward- content may be interesting or uplifting, it could be boring, it could inspire introspection or social comparison, etc.

Your emotional response to content may also be more complex. You could find certain content both interesting and depressing, both engaging and stressful. For many people, preferred content creates varied emotional responses. Everyone is different so, not surprisingly, different people have different emotional responses to a particular piece of content. For instance, there may be a show that everyone you know thinks is hilarious and you might find it annoying. The trick is to know how *you* respond emotionally to certain content. You can then shift your mood by adjusting the content you're consuming.



You may find that some content needs to be cut out entirely because of its effect on your mood. But most of the time, you can make some adjustments to how and when you consume content. It may be that some content, while highly interesting, leaves you feeling bad. So, limit your exposure to that content (in other words- no binging) or follow it up with something lighter or more uplifting. Or you may only listen to that content at certain times of day, like during downtime in the afternoon rather than right before bed. You may also take breaks from certain content for periods of time. For instance, you may take a break from social media, or you may decide not to watch a particular show for a few weeks.





Try this strategy over the next couple weeks. First, take in content as you normally would (TV, movies, podcasts, music, social media, etc.). But, as you engage with the content notice how you feel and whether the content helps you feel better, makes you feel worse, or if you selected the content based on the mood you were already in. Then, start making little changes to your content consumption. If content makes you feel bad, make adjustments- either stop consuming that content, reduce your consumption, or play with the timing of when you take in that content. And then see how you feel. More mindful content consumption can be a component in your overall self-care and in your mindfulness practice.

****Note that this strategy is most useful for managing less persistent mood issues and for boosting your mood when you need it. When people have persistent mood episodes, this strategy could be 1 small component that's utilized, but it certainly would not be a primary intervention.**