

## Introduction to Mindfulness Practice: Information & Practices



Mindfulness Practice encourages focus on the moment as a respite from ruminating and suffering with the pain of the past or anxiety over the future. The Practice involves the intention and motivation to be awake and aware in the present moment, using a natural or local support, such as the breath, body, movement, sound or daily activity. And every time you notice your mind wandering into the past or the future, you use this support to bring your attention back into the present moment with kindness and non-judgement.

It's been celebrity endorsed and scientifically scrutinised by hundreds of mental health and clinical groups, embraced by global corporations (keen to improve productivity) and adopted by the US Marine Corps (keen to reduce suicide and PTSD rates). Schools are putting it on the timetable. Newspaper supplements have run cover stories on it.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has approved it for use in the treatment of depression. Recently a report based on the analysis of 47 clinical trials involving 3,000 participants showed that mindfulness produces "measurable improvement of up to 20 per cent in symptoms of anxiety and depression... and can also help alleviate feelings of stress, improve working memory, and enhance the quality of life". And the NHS is embracing it as part of a more holistic approach to healing. There is clinical evidence that Mindfulness Practice reduces the key indicators of chronic stress including hypertension, and can boost the immune system as well as significantly support the management of serious conditions such as chronic pain and cancer.

Mindfulness and Compassion are at the heart of Buddhist meditation; however the secular practice is a form of disciplined enhanced mental training in much the same way that a commitment to continuous appropriate physical training supports and maintains optimal physical health.

## MINDFUL AIMS

A mindful start to your day (write on a post it and stick to your desk or computer)

- ✓ Attitude (How)      What is my attitude towards Mindful Practice today?
- ✓ Intention (What)    What is my intention for practicing (not about success or failure)?
- ✓ Motivation (Why)    What motivates me to persevere with Mindfulness Practice?
- ✓ Support (For Whom) Who may benefit from my commitment to this practice?

For example:

- A = *'Today open and curious about practice.'*
- I = *'Observing when I feel irritated and noticing how thoughts 'feel' within my body.'*
- M = *'Learning to accept uncomfortable feelings better.'*
- S = *'Benefit for myself and others with whom I live and work.'*

## PRACTICING

Mindfulness can be practiced in many ways, either by dedicated practice through sitting, standing or lying down, or by bringing awareness to everyday activities such as brushing your teeth, washing the dishes, drinking a cup of tea, walking to the photocopier, or even eating a raisin or a piece of chocolate.

### **The Chocolate Bar Practice** *(adapted from Williams, M & Penman, D)*

1. Initially taking three or four long in-breaths and out-breaths, then breathing naturally.
2. Slowly un-wrapping the packet, taking in the sounds, inhaling the aroma.
3. Noticing the physical sensations in the body as you break or hold a piece of chocolate, observing what the chocolate looks like and feels like in your fingers, examining every nook and cranny.
4. Noticing the physical sensations in your mouth and body as you anticipate bringing the chocolate into the mouth. Seeing if it's possible to hold it on your tongue and let it melt, noticing any tendency to want to suck or chew. Chocolate has over three hundred different flavours. See if you can sense some of them.
5. If you notice your mind wandering into distraction away from the chocolate, simply notice where the mind has gone, then gently escort the mind back to the chocolate in the present moment.
6. After the chocolate has completely melted, swallowing it very slowly and deliberately, letting it trickle down your throat, noticing thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations without judging them as either good or bad. Accepting them, just as they are.
7. Repeat this with the next piece!

### **A Three Minute Mindfulness Practice using the Breath**

1. Sitting in a straight back chair, holding the spine comfortably upright and slightly away from the back of the chair, self supporting and dignified. Placing the feet flat on the floor, legs uncrossed, hands resting in the lap, closing your eyes or lowering your gaze just past the tip of your nose.
2. Considering your attitude, intention, motivation and benefits for Mindful Practice
3. Initially taking three or four long in-breaths and out-breaths, then breathing naturally.
4. Focussing your attention on the natural rhythm of each breath as it flows in and out of the body. Staying in touch with the different sensations of each in-breath and each out-breath, moment by moment without looking for anything to happen.
5. Noticing thoughts and feelings about the past, present and future wandering into the mind. This is perfectly natural. Simply bringing your attention back to the breath, without any judgement – the act of realising that your mind has wandered and bringing your attention back without critiquing yourself is central to the practice of Mindfulness.
6. Your mind may eventually become calm like a still pond – or it may not. Even if you get a sense of absolute stillness, it may only be fleeting. If you feel irritated or impatient noticing where these feelings are in the body and breathing into them until they too dissolve in awareness. Whatever happens, just allowing things to be just as they are in the present moment.
7. Finally allowing yourself to invisibly smile with each out breath, first smiling behind the forehead, then behind the eyes, behind the mouth and within the heart, and congratulating yourself for practicing mindfulness.

### **Ideas for Reading, Websites and Apps** (and there are plenty more out there...)

- ❖ Wax, Ruby (2016) **Mindfulness Guide for the Frazzled**, UK, Penguin Life
- ❖ Kabat-Zinn, J (2013) **Full Catastrophe Living**, LONDON, Piatas
- ❖ Williams, M & Penman, D (2011) **Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World**, LONDON, Piatas (**with a great practice CD**)
- ❖ Kumar, Sameet (2005) **Grieving Mindfully**, CA (USA), New Harbinger Publications
- ❖ Nairn, R (2001) **Diamond Mind: A Psychology of Meditation**, LONDON, Shambala
  
- ✓ **Be Mindful Website** – on-line from NHS Mental Health Foundation
- ✓ **Breathworks Website** – International organisation for info, apps and training
- ✓ **Mindfulness Association UK Website** – National organisation for info and training
- ✓ **Headspace** (app with free trial & subscription)
- ✓ **Insight Time** (free app with options for subscription)
- ✓ **Buddhify** (app with subscription)

