



What is Mindfulness?

Put simply, mindfulness is the act of bringing yourself into the present moment through focusing on what is happening now. It allows you to become completely aware of what is going on in your mind, body and in the world around you. Through practising mindfulness techniques, you can increase your awareness and curiosity of what is going on at the present time and bring your complete attention to the moment. It enables you at any time of the day or night to be able to pause, breathe, create space in your mind and body for any length of time, even a few minutes.

Typical mindfulness methods focus your full attention on your breath, while giving a non-judgemental, compassionate and friendly curiosity to your thoughts and feelings (negative ones too) that come and go. You can get back control of your life through allowing yourself to live not in the past or future, but in the only life you have, which is in the present.

The techniques are simple and are suitable for everyone, regardless of age or beliefs. There are countless mindfulness methods available via books, websites, apps (see a list below), so you will be able to find the ones that suit you best and fit into your lifestyle and routine. It is a way of being, not just a short term technique, so requires regular practice. Different to meditation, mindfulness can be done at any time, even when doing daily chores by being fully present in what you are doing. There is no right or wrong way to practice.

Mindfulness has been practised for thousands of years, but is increasingly relevant today, as a well-researched, science based, practical method to improve our health, wellbeing and happiness.

It's also simple to understand and can be free!

How can it help?

Studies have shown that regular mindfulness practices can increase happiness and positive emotions which can have huge medical significance. It has been shown to decrease anxiety, depression, stress, self-critical thoughts, overthinking, memory loss, sleep issues, low energy, irritation with others and have a positive effect on your immune system and serious conditions such as chronic pain.

Many of the above conditions are caused because of the frantic world we live in. Busy lives can create a focus on to do lists and always looking to the future without pausing enough to notice life moments (positive and negative), which can only be in the present. Through awareness, noticing and pausing, even the smallest moments can be felt and stored up, pushing out negative thoughts and feelings and creating space. Getting stuck in the past can create habitual negative self-critical thoughts and feelings and through recognising these and being in the now, it is possible to let these go and to move forward in control. Being aware of how your body and mind are connected can help with overthinking and sleep issues, breaking habits and supporting better sleep patterns. By being kind to yourself, talking to yourself with compassion, critical thoughts will ease and if your mind wanders off during the practices, that's fine, just notice them and gently bring your mind back to the present.



Mindfulness practices

Here are some examples of simple short practical mindfulness practices that anyone can do:

Breathwork practices:

There are many variations in breathwork, from rhythmic breathing (following a pattern such as 4-2-4-2, 6-3-6-3, 8-4-8-4 or any pattern that works for you), counting on the inhale and exhale, counting forward and backward and abdominal breathing (put your right hand on your chest and left hand on your belly, breathe deeply and feel how your hands move).

One minute practice:

Sit upright in a chair with a straight back, feet flat on the floor, close your eyes or lower your gaze. Focus your attention on your breath going in and out, just notice any sensations that come with the breath. If your mind wanders, be aware of it without giving yourself a hard time as its normal and gently bring it back to your breath. Being able to bring your attention back without being critical of yourself is a large part of mindfulness practice. This practice can be done anywhere (not when driving!), outside or inside and can fit into your daily routine.

Routine activity practice:

Chose a routine activity that you do every day such as brushing your teeth, having a shower/bath, drinking tea/coffee, watching TV or walking. Pay full attention to what you are doing, using all your senses, noticing the sensations you feel and being fully alive with in that moment. If your mind wanders to what's next, gently bring it back.

Body scan practice (can be helpful with sleep issues):

If available to you, lie down, otherwise sit comfortably. Close your eyes or keep them open if you prefer. Bring your awareness to the physical sensations of your body, where it touches the floor or chair. Relax into the surface using your out breath. If you feel no sensations just acknowledge this. Focus on your abdomen and how it rises and falls. Now take your focus down your legs to your toes, allow any sensations to just be as they are. When you breath in, imagine the breath going from your lungs down your legs to your feet and toes and when you breath out, imagine the breath flowing up through your body and out of your nose. Then move your attention, scanning in the same way to your lower legs, knees, upper legs, pelvic area, hips, lower back, abdomen, upper back, chest, shoulders, arms, hands and fingers, neck, jaw, face and whole head. Stay with each part of the body for as long as you want to and if your mind wanders, gently bring it back to the area you are focusing on. At the end, bring your attention to the whole body and your breath going in and out. This practice can make you sleepy so can be good for those with sleep issues.

Visualisation practice:

Either sitting or lying down. Close your eyes if comfortable. Focus your attention on your normal breath and then breathe deeper, continuing to focus. Take your mind to a place that brings you joy and happiness that you are familiar with. Visualise that place, noticing who is there if anyone, the sounds you hear, the colours, smells and other sensations. Immerse yourself in being in that place. If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to that place, noticing everything around you. It could be on a beach, somewhere inside or a walk that you know well. As you are walking, keep your head up and notice new things and sounds. This practice can be helpful to stop overthinking and good for those with sleep issues.



Awareness of the senses practice:

This can be done at any time during the day and helps you to tune into your senses without judgement and bring you back into the present. Notice five things you can see and really notice them in detail. Notice four things you can hear by listening deeper. Notice three things you can feel with your body. Notice two things you can smell. Notice one thing you can taste, even if it's just the absence of a taste.

Walking and light practice:

If you are able, walk or go outside for even five minutes but longer if possible. As you walk, keep your head up and look around you, noticing at least three things that you haven't noticed before. This will bring you into the here and now and fully present.

There are many more mindfulness practices, such as mindful eating, mindfulness movement, journaling and breathwork, treating yourself with kindness, compassion focused practices and more. It's about finding the practice that is right for you, being kind to yourself and knowing that it's normal for the mind to wander off. After practising mindfulness regularly, you will find that you are in the present and fully alive unconsciously much more of the time.

Being in the present, paying attention and really listening:

It can be hard not to overthink and to slow down in our busy lives. It is easy to live on our lists of what needs to be done and in the past, rather than living our lives when they are happening, in the present. Life is not what is going on in the future or the past, it is only what is going on in the now. By consciously throughout the day either taking the time to notice fully what is going on in a specific moment, really listening to someone else, noticing new things that you haven't noticed before, you can store up these feelings and moments, however short, which will push out more negative thoughts and feelings and give yourself space. You will find joy in the smallest and simplest moments. Take the time to say 'pause' to yourself which will remind you to bring yourself back into the present.

Being kind to yourself:

Remember that you are the most important person and you can only control what you do, think, feel and how you react to others. Always be kind to yourself and talk to yourself as if you were talking to a good friend. Show empathy and compassion to yourself as well as others.

If you want to find out more about mindfulness and other practices, here are some signposting suggestions, but there are many more if you search for mindfulness online:

Books:

Jon Kabat-Zinn: 'Wherever You Go, There You Are.' 'Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain and Illness.'

Mark Williams, Danny Penman: 'Mindfulness, a practical guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World.'

Jason Hemlock: 'Mindful Living.'



Websites:

www.oxfordmindfulness.org

www.franticworld.com

www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/tips-and-support/mindfulness/

www.mindful.org

www.mind.org.uk

www.ageuk.org.uk

www.bamba.org.uk

www.mindfulnessassociation.net

Online apps:

Headspace

Calm

Calmer You

Waking Up: Meditation and Wisdom

Escape Into Nature

Meditation and Mindfulness

Contact Details

If you require further advice please contact Weldmar Hospicecare Allied Health Care Professionals (Physio) on **01305 215322** or the Weldmar Complementary Therapy Team complementarytherapy@weld-hospice.org.uk



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