

## Mindfulness

### What is Mindfulness?

It may be defined as focusing your attention on purpose to cultivate a non-judgemental and moment-to-moment awareness.

### What does it involve?

Using a variety of exercises, mindfulness practitioners learn to pay attention to their 'brain chatter' and automatic reactions, to slow them down and experience the present moment as it really is. These exercises could be as simple as paying attention to your breathing and experiencing the sensations in your body as you breathe; all the while noticing that your brain is 'chattering' away at you, which is what the brain does, and to let these thoughts come and go without getting caught up in them.

### Being on Automatic Pilot

Have you ever been driving somewhere and arrived at your destination without quite knowing how you got there? Have you ever started eating a meal then suddenly realised that you have an empty plate in front of you? Most people have. These are examples when our mind goes into 'automatic pilot' mode. Most of us lead a busy day-to-day life. Depending on your course and role in the university, you may be managing academic work, a placement, family and social life all at the same time! When we multitask and juggle with commitments, it is easy to lose awareness of the present moment.

### Who is it for?

It is for anyone from any walk of life. People have practised mindfulness to alleviate the effects of life stresses, medical conditions, and psychological distress or simply to improve their general wellbeing. Although mindfulness meditation has its roots in Eastern traditions, it does not have to have a religious component to it.

### Effects of Mindfulness Training

The scientific community has been very interested in the effects of mindfulness. Research has shown that neurochemical changes take place in the brain post-mindfulness practice.

It has also been found to: reduce stress, decrease the intensity of reoccurring depression, increase one's ability to cope with chronic pain, enable people to handle stressful situations better, and to relax.

### A Taste of Mindfulness

Try this simple mindful breathing exercise:

Remember that the primary goal of mindfulness meditation is to focus your attention on purpose. In this instance, you are focusing your attention on your breathing. You will notice your thoughts and feelings 'chattering' to you. Allow these to come and go without getting caught up in them. Try this exercise for five minutes. Perhaps set an alarm to notify you when the five minutes is up? You can increase the duration of this exercise once you feel more comfortable with it.

1. Sit comfortably, with your eyes closed and your spine reasonably straight.
2. Direct your attention to your breathing.
3. When thoughts, emotions, physical sensations and external sounds from the environment occur, simply notice that they are there, and let them come and go without judging or dwelling on them.
4. When you notice that your attention has drifted off either to something that has happened earlier during the day or to what you have to do later, simply note that your attention has drifted and then gently direct your attention back to your breathing. No matter how many times this happens, just keep bringing your attention back to your breathing.

### Further reading

- Be Mindful  
More information about mindfulness and online courses at:  
<https://bemindful.co.uk>
- GET Self Help  
More information about mindfulness and exercises at  
[www.getselfhelp.co.uk/mindfulness.htm](http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/mindfulness.htm)

- Mindfulness in Eight Weeks by Michael Chaskalson.  
A self-help book that guides you through an eight-week course, using a mixture of psychoeducation, mindful exercises and suggestions for daily home practice.
- Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness Meditation for Everyday Life by Jon Kabat-Zinn.

### Mindfulness on campus

The University offers free mindfulness sessions every Wednesday from 1:30pm to 2:30pm in the Fitness Studio in MDX House. The sessions are designed to be a quiet and reflective space where the facilitator will guide the group through some mindfulness activities. Membership of the Fitness Pod is not required to attend these sessions.

For up-to-date details, please see the website at: <http://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/your-middlesex/sport/how-to-get-involved/exercise-classes>

Coming to Britain to Study  
Coping with Trauma  
Depression  
Eating Disorders  
Exam Anxiety  
Helping someone you are Concerned About  
Managing Stress  
Mature Students  
Mental Health  
Relaxation  
Work Difficulties and Study Blocks  
Working in Groups

Mar 2018

### Further leaflets in this series

Abuse  
Addictive Behaviour  
Anxiety and Panic  
Bereavement and Loss  
Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

Counselling and  
Mental Health