

Mindfulness

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness means to deliberately pay attention to whatever you are doing, right now. These pages can be read mindfully or with a mind not fully focussed and aware that you are reading an article. Everything except sleep can be done mindfully. We can eat mindfully or we can think about past or future event without paying attention to our eating.

What is mindfulness therapy?

Mindfulness therapy means firstly to have a daily mindfulness practice and to use what we learn from it to remain mindful, aware, during the difficult situations in life. In particular we become aware of our

- **thoughts** “I must be stupid to do this”,
- **feelings**: sadness, anger etc,
- **behaviour**: aggression, withdrawing, doing a breathing exercise
- **physiological changes**: fast breathing, weight in stomach, pins and needles, nausea.

These are the big four, we will be coming back to thoughts, feelings, behaviour, physiological changes time and again. A range of mindfulness exercises address the different areas.

Mindfulness therapy means to simply observe what is happening to us in those four areas, particularly with difficult emotions. You may express what is happening either in a journal or to someone else but there is no intention to change anything. The aim is more to become familiar with how the mind works and its habit patterns.

What are the benefits of mindfulness?

Your mind is like any other part of your being, there are benefits from understanding how it works and you can train it to work better. Specifically a mindfulness practice has the following benefits:

1. **Stability of mind** – maintaining your mind in an alert clear space rather than at the two extremes of a dull or agitated mind.
2. **Flexibility of mind** – the ability to shift your mind to whatever object you choose, rather than having it bounce haphazardly between a number of issues
3. **Self awareness** – being aware of the contents of your mind and understanding the typical patterns of your mind
4. **Acting** rather than **reacting** – Becoming less reactive, e.g. when you are angry and choosing how you will act.

It's not called a practice for nothing. Like any other form of therapy real change will require hard work and commitment, in this case a commitment to maintain your practice six days per week.

How does it work?

While most of what we achieve is by “doing”, mindfulness achieves its ends by “not doing,” simply by observing. It seems to achieve its success by allowing us to see our thoughts and emotions for what they are, thoughts we are having at the moment and emotions we are experiencing.

Thoughts like “I must be stupid” are subtle and we generally believe them uncritically. By being mindful of our thoughts we gradually get the idea that they are just thoughts that we are having and there is no need to believe them uncritically. Similarly with a feeling like “anger” we start to realize that it is a feeling that is currently strong within us but no more than that, we currently have anger, but it doesn’t define us and it will pass. We stop identifying with the thoughts and emotions. Our mind ceases to be in the control of strong feelings and thoughts and slowly comes under our own control.