

The Little Book of Mindfulness

**10 Minutes a Day to
Less Stress, More Peace**



Dr Patrizia Collard

Introduction

What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is being aware of or bringing attention to this moment in time, deliberately and without judging the experience. So, when we go for a [mindful walk](#) we really notice every little detail and all we encounter – trees, cars, flowers growing out of small cracks, or a cat crossing the road – rather than creating to-do lists.



By reconnecting with these simple moments in life, by truly living moment by moment, it is possible to rediscover a sense of peace and enjoyment. We may, at least sometimes, feel once again truly enchanted with life.

As a form of therapy, mindfulness has recently been in the news a great deal. It is recommended by the Department of Health and also in the guidelines set

down by NICE (National Institute for Clinical Excellence), and many see it as a cheap, effective and 'doable' intervention for our stress-filled lives, as much as a skill that can prevent us from actually breaking down or becoming ill if we incorporate it into our daily lives.

More than 10,000 published research papers are available on mindfulness-based therapies, should you want to check out the subject in depth, and there are many online videos you can also watch. The application of mindfulness covers a range of situations, such as in parenting training, the treatment of mental health, in schools and as part of well-being therapies. It is even used in treating the immune system, with some positive outcomes for patients with HIV, ME (chronic fatigue syndrome) and MS.

Benefits of Practising Mindfulness

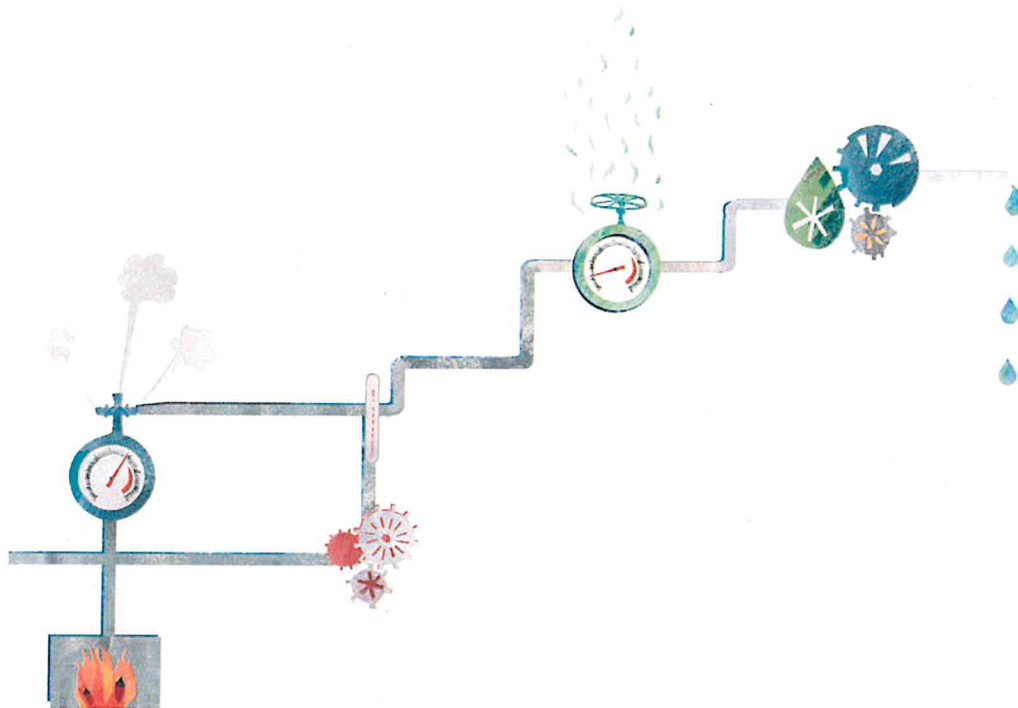
People who regularly implement mindfulness strategies may find lasting physical and psychological benefits, such as:

- ~ Increased experience of calm and relaxation
- ~ Higher levels of energy and enthusiasm for living
- ~ Increased self-confidence and self-acceptance
- ~ Less danger of experiencing stress, depression, anxiety, chronic pain, addiction or low immune efficiency
- ~ More self-compassion and compassion for others and our planet.

How It Began

Just over 30 years ago, a molecular biologist, while meditating, had the inspiration to bring meditation into the secular world of a hospital. In 1979, Jon Kabat-Zinn gave up his career as a scientist and started a stress-reduction clinic in Massachusetts University Hospital. He had studied Korean Zen and yoga in the past and is a regular meditator.

In the early 1990s, a 40-minute TV programme introduced mindfulness, which originated in contemplative teachings, to a wider audience. Several thousand people wanted to learn the ‘mindfulness stuff’ after they watched the programme. Around this time Jon wrote *Full Catastrophe Living* – the title is based on Alexis Zorbas in the film *Zorba the Greek*, played by Anthony Quinn, who says: ‘Am I not a man? And is a man not stupid? I’m a man, so I married. Wife, children, house, everything. The full catastrophe!’



A decade later, psychotherapists in Canada and the UK began to understand that mindfulness interventions may also be useful for reducing and improving psychological disorders. *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) for Depression* (2002) was the first publication in which the ancient wisdom was interwoven with cognitive therapy to help patients not to relapse into depressive episodes.

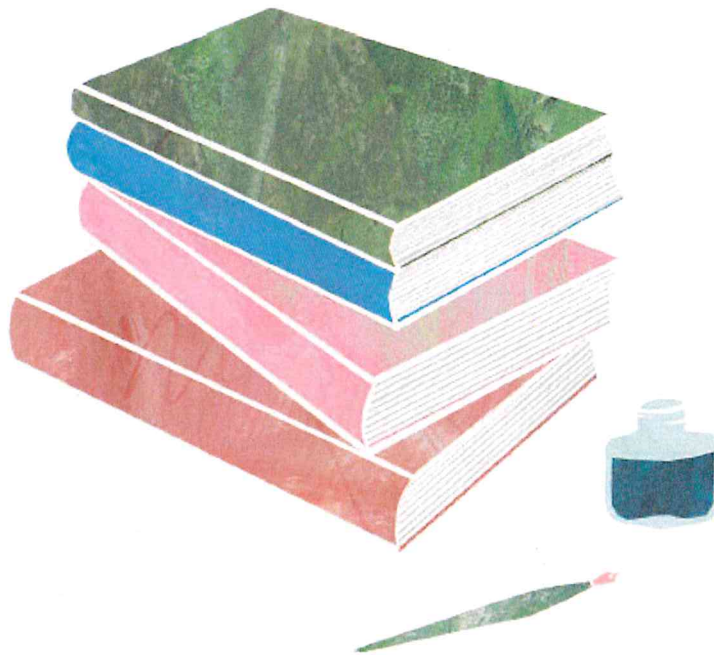
Today, MBCT and MBSR (mindfulness-based stress reduction) are used to treat a multitude of illnesses including anxiety, stress, burnout, trauma, chronic pain, some forms of cancer, psoriasis, eating disorders, addiction and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD).

Learning During a Lunch Hour

In 2008, I wrote an academic paper (Collard and Walsh) that was based on my experience of teaching mindfulness to university employees. The participants were academics, technicians and administration staff. The 'awareness training' that I taught for one lunchtime hour each week was a new set of skills to help the staff achieve a better life-work equilibrium. They were instructed to connect regularly with all their five senses and to focus non-judgementally on the here-and-now experience of life. The exercises I chose were neither difficult to teach nor hard to learn; I did emphasize, however, that students should ideally enter into a regular routine of practice in order for change to occur.

These brief weekly sessions helped to bring about valuable changes and health improvements in the participants. The motto was: we are all different and special, so we do not attempt to become like somebody else, but connect more deeply with our true selves.

Their stress levels were reduced (although Christmas was just round the corner), their language and support for each other became more compassionate and, in general, they felt more joyful and had a sense of life being an adventure.



Mindfulness is a new way of being, a new way of
experiencing life and improving one's work-life
balance



Reconnecting to Life

When teaching mindfulness, we point out that this skill may not actually ‘heal’ all ills, but what it will do is change our perspective on discomfort and open new possibilities for moving from just ‘being’ and ‘struggling’ back towards ‘adventurous living.’ You learn to live around the pain rather than focus on it all the time. Pain in your shoulder will become a pain in the shoulder and maybe even retreat into the background of your awareness while you focus on the ‘breath’ or ‘listen to sounds around you.’

We have started to understand that mindfulness practice may prevent us from getting sick and unhappy, but it can also return our awareness to the childlike curiosity we all had when we were young. We may experience once again the wondrous qualities of natural life: a blade of grass, clouds in the sky, the taste of a delicious strawberry, the importance of surrounding ourselves with friends and others who care deeply for us.

We remember all of a sudden that it is these little moments that are the true wonders of being alive. These glimpses of joy really matter, because they connect us to life rather than split us from it.

‘When you drink just drink,
when you walk just walk.’

Zen saying

Thoughts Change Our Reality

Mindfulness practice, if regularly observed, can not only change the biochemistry of our body, but also change the brain structurally. The title of ‘happiest man on earth’ has been given to Matthieu Ricard, a Buddhist monk with a PhD in biology. He has a much smaller control centre (amygdala) than other humans and can endure being in an fMRI scanner for a couple of hours. Once, when he came out of a scanner, having gone through three long meditations while being observed, he is supposed to have said that the experience was almost like a nice retreat. His shrunken amygdala also helps him not to blink when there is a loud noise close by. He is ‘Mr Calm’, but he does still mindfully check a road before crossing it.



Increasing Gratitude

With this growing of awareness, we subconsciously also increase gratitude and compassion, as can be proven by looking at Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) studies of the brain.

Appreciation occurs when we begin to realize what we have been gifted with, and loving kindness reconnects us to others in a win-win attitude. We start to focus on positive thoughts and perceptions and, for a while, we let go of our fearful, anxious brain pattern. In fact, every action we engage in can become a daily meditation, a slowing-down and an appreciation of life. It seems so simple, in some ways, that it is almost embarrassing to have to study it.

We need only remember when we were children who gazed at the sky and the drifting clouds. There was nothing to do, nothing to achieve. There was no notion of time nor any guilt for 'wasting' it. Time and guilt are concepts we learn about much later in life.

Join Me...

With this little book, I would like to invite you to join me and feel once more what it is like to be consciously alive and to connect to the sense that every moment of life is precious. I would like to remind you how meaningful it can be to taste a strawberry, or to smell lavender, or to stroke somebody we love and really feel and connect with them.

Of course, as life is a dualistic experience, we will also become more sensitive to the painful aspects of our lives. Yet even this can have advantages. It may prevent us from eating an out-of-date sandwich or staying with a partner or job that is destructive to us. If we all managed to stop doing so much, even for just a few minutes a day, we would enrich our experience of life and help our bodies and minds stay healthy and well.

Each chapter in the book shows you 5- and 10-minute practices and inspirations which you can try in any order that you choose to. You may of course like to take more time to explore them than the times suggested; whatever you do is fine.

My hope and endeavour is to help you move closer to the stillness and joy within.

Meditation and Posture Tips

- ✻ Some exercises suggest you sit in a chair. I recommend an upright chair that will support your spine, but is comfortable. It helps to wear loose-fitting clothes and perhaps use a shawl or blanket to prevent you feeling cold – often, when we meditate, we become more relaxed and our body temperature tends to drop a little, just as it does when we get ready for sleep.
- ✻ Sit with dignity – neither upright and rigid like a soldier, nor slumping over. Sitting in this way helps you to be focused and aware of any sensation as it arises, and connect with this sensation – temperature, sound, or your breathing, for example – as an anchor of awareness, to prevent your mind roaming and ending up in some anxious train of thought.
- ✻ Each time you get ready to practise any of the exercises in this book, take a few moments to ‘check in’ with yourself. Always feel free to continue the practice if that feels best for you at the time.
- ✻ If your body is not able to do any of the movement postures, just sit comfortably and run through them in your mind. Please never do anything that causes pain. Less is often more.



inspiration

Peace

There is only silence
On the mountain tops
Among the tips of the trees
You perceive barely a breath
Even the birds in the forest
Keep still and are silent
Wait then
Just a little while longer
And you too
will find peace at last.

J.W. von Goethe
translated by Patrizia Collard