

## **Pocket sized Mindfulness for People Who Care**

This information contains notes and quotes to back up the discussions that we have during our group session. The home practice is detailed at the end of each week's session notes.

You may find it useful to keep notes of your experiences as the course progresses. There are spaces in the information to do this. Any notes you make are entirely to facilitate your own learning process and there will be no need for them to be seen anyone else. If you wish, you can use your notes to remind you of your experiences during the week, and any questions you have, which you may want to bring to our session.

If there are any difficulties in connection with the course, please contact your teacher to discuss things.

We hope that the course is a useful and enjoyable learning experience for you.

*'...make the moment vital and worth living...do not let it slip  
away unnoticed and unused'.*

*Martha Graham*

*Quoted in 'Mindfulness Meditation for Everyday Life' by Jon Kabat-Zinn, Piatkus:  
London, 1994*

## Session 1 – Automatic Pilot

- The aim of the programme is to learn new and more effective ways of handling our moods and emotions.
- We do this by focusing on the small changes in thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations that are linked to mood fluctuations.
- To focus on these changes, we have to become more aware of them.
- Our attention is not always placed fully in the moment – we are often not at ‘home’.
- The **Body Scan** helps us gain control over our attention, enabling us to enter more deeply into our present experience.

In a car we can sometimes drive for miles on automatic pilot, without really being aware of what we are doing. In the same way, we may not be really present, moment-by-moment, for much of our lives. We can often be miles away without knowing it.

When we care for someone, we may also operate on automatic pilot, jumping from one task to the next, and forgetting to live in the moment.

On automatic pilot, we are more likely to have our buttons pressed. Our thoughts, feelings, and sensations, as well as events in the world around us – many of which we may be only dimly aware of – can trigger habits of thinking that are unhelpful and lead to stress.

By becoming **more aware**, from moment to moment, of our thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations, as well as the world around us, we give ourselves the possibility of **greater freedom and choice**. We do not have to go down the same old mental ruts that have caused problems in the past.

The aim of this course is to **increase awareness** so that we can **respond** to situations **with choice**, rather than react automatically. We do that by practicing becoming more aware of where our attention is and deliberately changing the way we pay attention, over and over again. Mindfulness is not about trying to get anywhere. Rather, it is simply a matter of being aware of where and how we are and giving ourselves the space to make conscious choices.

To begin with, we place our attention in different parts of the body, using each part of the body as a focus to anchor our awareness in the moment. We train ourselves to place our attention and awareness in different places at will, thus enabling us to enter more deeply into our present experience. The process of entering more deeply into our current experience is the aim of the Body Scan exercise, which forms the main home practice exercise for next week.

Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way:  
on purpose the  
present moment  
and non-judgementally

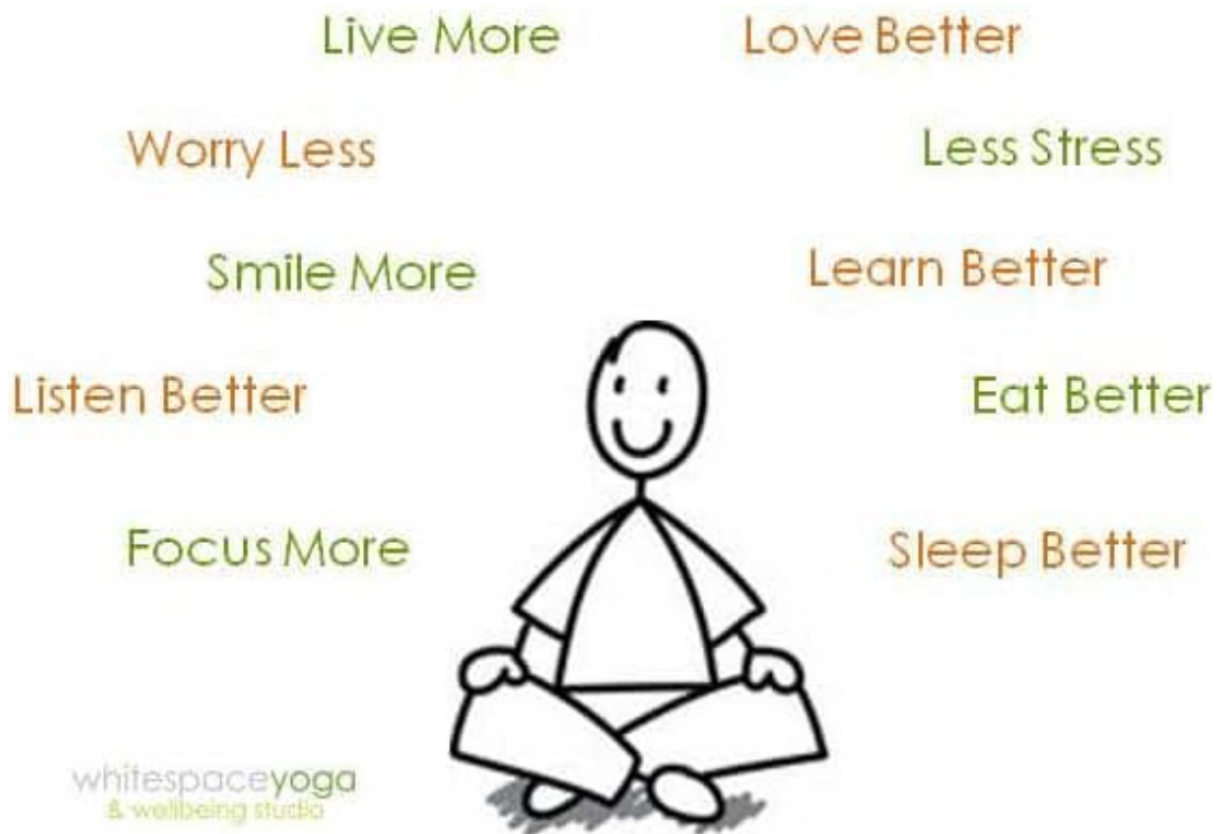
**JON KABAT-ZINN**

*(‘Full Catastrophe Living’, Piatkus: London, 1996)*

### **The Benefits of Mindfulness Meditation**

Thousands of peer-reviewed scientific papers prove that mindfulness reduces pain, enhances mental and physical wellbeing and helps people deal with the stresses and strains of daily life. Here are a few of the main findings:

- Mindfulness is a potent antidote to anxiety, stress, depression, exhaustion and irritability. In short, regular meditators are happier and more contented, while being far less likely to suffer from psychological distress.
- Mindfulness is at least as good as medication or counselling for the treatment of clinical-level depression. One structured programme known as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) is now one of the preferred treatments recommended by the UK’s National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence.
- Mindfulness reduces addictive and self-destructive behaviour. These include the abuse of illegal and prescription drugs and excessive alcohol intake.
- Meditation enhances brain function. It increases grey matter in areas associated with self-awareness, empathy, self-control and attention. It soothes the parts of the brain that produce stress hormones and builds those areas that lift mood and promote learning. It even reduces some of the thinning of certain areas of the brain that naturally occurs with ageing.
- Meditation improves the immune system. Regular meditators are admitted to hospital far less often for cancer, heart disease and numerous infectious diseases.
- Mindfulness may reduce ageing at the cellular level by promoting chromosomal health and resilience.
- Meditation improves heart and circulatory health by reducing blood pressure and lowering the risk of hypertension.
- Mindfulness helps to reduce stress, depression, anxiety and promoting psychological well-being in people who care for others.
- Mindfulness can improve the relationship between the person receiving care and the person delivering the care.



A Story from one of our participants:

Stephen is a 72-year-old man who is caring for his wife with vascular dementia. He had never heard of mindfulness before but “wanted to know what it was all about.” At the initial interview he came across as someone who was experiencing a great deal of carer stress, which had been compounded by having to shield due to Covid for the past year. He was sceptical of mindfulness at first, wondering “what the point of it was” however he was able to attend all of the sessions and in the focus group spoke of how he had benefited a great deal from it and was very grateful for the course. He came across as being more relaxed and less stressed and was able to practice mindfulness between sessions which supported him in his caring role. He was particularly grateful of the fact that the course was online as he lives in a very remote part of Norfolk and would’ve found it difficult to attend a face-to-face group.

## **Home Practice**

We encourage home practice as part of the course. The benefits of mindfulness have been longer lasting in those who continue to engage in daily practice.

The patterns of the mind that we will be working to change have often been around for a long time. These patterns are also frequently habitual and automatic. We can only expect to succeed in making changes in these long-established ways of mind if we put time and effort into learning new ways.

It can be challenging to find the time to do the home practice that is part of this course. It really is worth it though. A useful attitude to adopt is – ‘I’ll give this my best shot, with an open mind. At the end of the course I’ll decide what the learning has been for me and what I can take away with me’. For you to make a decision about whether this approach could be a useful part of your life, we encourage you to engage with it as best as you can during these 6 weeks.

A part of each session will be used to reflect on your experiences of the home practice during the week. We will also discuss any difficulties that you may be experiencing with the practice – either in getting to do it or things that arise for you during the practice itself. Much of the learning of the course can be drawn from these experiences.

### **Facing difficulties**

A central aim of the approach is to learn how to be more fully aware and present in each moment of life. The good news is that this makes life more enjoyable, interesting, vivid and fulfilling. On the other hand, this means facing what is present, even when it is unpleasant and difficult. In practice you will find that turning to face and acknowledge difficulties is, in the long run, the most effective way to reduce unhappiness. In this course you will learn gentle ways to face difficulties and will be supported while doing this.

### **Patience and persistence**

Because we will be working to change established patterns of mind, much of the approach will involve investing considerable time and effort, the effects of which may only become apparent later. In many ways, this is much like gardening – we have to prepare the ground, plant the seed, and ensure that they are adequately watered and nourished – and then wait patiently for results.

The encouragement is therefore to approach this course with the same spirit of patience and persistence – committing yourself to attending the group and carrying out the home practice, while accepting, with patience, that the fruits of your efforts may not show straight away.

## The Practicalities of home practice

The meditations in this programme take only ten minutes and should, ideally, be carried out once daily.

We know it can be difficult to find time during the day for yourself when you care for someone else, so we'll leave it up to you to decide the best times for home practice.

We encourage you to not be hard on yourself if you find it difficult to find the time to practice within your daily routine. There are other ways to incorporate mindfulness into daily life, outside of formal practice.

Informal practice could involve:

- **Washing dishes:** Notice the water and feel the sensation of the warmth, the bubbles, and your hands on the dishes. Slow your movements down and pause for a moment to pay attention to each item you're washing.
- **Showering:** Feel the sensations and warmth of the water. Listen to the sound of the spray of the water around you. Notice your thoughts and feelings as you take in the entire experience of the shower.
- **Driving:** Pay attention with focused attention on what you see, the feel of the steering wheel in your hands and what you're hearing around you. Relax your shoulders and notice what you're feeling and experiencing as you mindfully drive.
- **Movement:** While walking, running, stretching bending or anytime you're moving your body throughout the day, bring your focus to the sensations in your body.
- **Routine care or domestic tasks:** When carrying out any tasks associated with running the family home or caring for someone, bring your attention into that moment and notice any bodily sensations or thoughts and feelings that arise. If boredom or frustration arises, simply acknowledge it, and bring your attention back to the task at hand. When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and bring your attention back to what you are doing.

## Guidelines for doing the body scan

Regardless of what happens (falling asleep, losing concentration, being distracted by thoughts, emotions or other physical sensations, don't feel anything), just do it! These are your experiences in the moment. All you have to do is be aware of them, even if your mind is wandering a great deal. If you are distracted by wandering thoughts, emotions or other physical sensations, simply notice them as passing events, and then gently return to the instructions on the CD.

- Notice if you have ideas about 'success', 'failure', 'doing it really well', or 'trying to purify the body'. This is not a competition. It is not a skill that you are striving to perfect. The only discipline involved is regular and frequent practice. See if it's possible to cultivate an attitude of openness and curiosity about whatever you happen to experience during the body scan.
- Try approaching your experience in each moment with the attitude: 'Ok, that's just the way things are right now'. If you try to fight off unpleasant thoughts, feelings, or body sensations, this may only distract you from experiencing anything else.
- Notice if you have expectations about what the body scan will do for you; instead you might think that you're planting a seed. The more you poke around and interfere, the less it will be able to develop. When you leave it to grow, this seed will eventually expand to become a life lived with more mindfulness, and the freedom to choose skilful behaviours.
- So with the body scan, you only have to give it the most helpful conditions: time that you set aside to devote to yourself and the body scan, privacy and quiet, and regular and frequent practice. The more you try to control the effects of the body scan, the less effective it will be.
- The most important guideline is: **just do it!**

## **Informal Practice for Week 1 - The Coffee Meditation**

Coffee and tea are drinks that we take for granted, which makes them ideal for meditation. You can use this meditation to settle the mind before making a decision or simply to gain a glimpse of mindful awareness. Repeat it whenever you choose or do it with any drink at all.

- If you are making the drink yourself, look closely at the coffee grounds (or tea leaves). Really observe them. Spend a few moments letting your eyes soak up every detail. Observe how the light bounces off the grounds or leaves.
- Add the water. What can you hear? What can you smell? If you are buying your drink, soak up all of the sounds and smells of the café. Can you hear tinkling cups? The hiss of water? The chatter of other customers? Try to tune directly into your senses, rather than mentally describing the experience in words.
- If you are adding milk and sugar, watch how they dissolve. Does the smell change? Focus on the subtly different aromas.
- Take a sip. Coffee has thirty different flavours and tea has many more. See if you can sense some of them. Are there some bitter notes, sweet ones, sour ones...?
- Resist the temptation to gulp down that sip; instead, after a few moments, or when you feel that your taste buds have become saturated, swallow it. How does it feel? When you breathe in, how do your mouth and throat feel? Hot? Cold? Or hot followed by cold?
- Repeat the previous two steps with another sip of your drink. Carry on repeating this for five minutes or until you've finished your drink.

How do you feel? Is it different from normal? Did the drink taste better than if you had consumed it at your normal speed?







## **The Journey**

One day you finally knew what you had to do, and began, though the voices around you kept shouting their bad advice – the whole house began to tremble and you felt the old tug at your ankles.

'Mend my life!' each voice cried. but you didn't stop. You knew what you had to do, though the wind pried it's stiff fingers at the very foundations, though their melancholy was terrible. It was already late enough, and a wild night, and the road full of fallen branches and stones.

But little by little, as you left their voices behind, the stars began to burn through the sheets of clouds, and there was a new voice which you slowly recognised as your own, that kept you company as you strode deeper and deeper into the world determined to do the only thing you could do – determined to save the only life you could save.

*Mary Oliver, from Dreamwork*

*In New and Selected Poems, Beacon Press, Boston, 1992 Page left blank for your own thoughts or reflections*