


Head *first*



Tuning out of the world around you can sometimes feel impossible. Yet, spending a moment doing nothing is as important to your routine as taking a daily shower. Take ten to discover why mindfulness needs a place in your life...

When was the last time you spent a moment signing out of the world around you and checking in with yourself? In 2017, our lives have reached a level so hectic that we're fighting a constant battle to find headspace, but the answer could be mindfulness.

Mindfulness means focusing on the present moment; simply breathing and living. It's a modern adaption of the Buddhist tradition of Vipassana meditation, or the 'mindfulness of breathing'. By simply embracing life as it presents itself we can access deeper levels of self-awareness and wellbeing. The best bit? You can practice anywhere, anytime.

ORIGINS OF MINDFULNESS

As one of today's more positive cultural trends, mindfulness is rapidly changing the way we view the ancient practice of Buddhist meditation.

Aspects of Buddhism spread from the East to the West throughout the 70s and 80s mainly via those travelling Asia and bringing its traditions home. It also spread through the writings of Japanese scholar D.T. Suzuki, who offered a modern take on Zen Buddhism for Western tastes. Meanwhile, a pioneer called Jon Kabat-Zinn translated his studies on insight meditation to a clinical setting where mental health and chronic illnesses could be treated. Kabat-Zinn's adapted framework removed the religious aspect of meditation, combined it with Hatha yoga and placed it in a scientific context. His Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) forms the basis of what we know today as mindfulness practice.

Mindfulness meditation is now applied in psychology, psychiatry and therapy, with an increasing number of programmes in schools, hospitals and prisons inspired by its long list of benefits.

COOL AS A CUCUMBER

If you're new to mindfulness, or slightly sceptical, it will completely win you over once you know and experience the benefits of regular practice.

Already there are several popular mindfulness apps with a cult following, such as Headspace, which has over 6 million downloads. Headspace reports that 163 individual studies have confirmed mindfulness has an overall positive effect on anxiety and stress. Neuroscientists support this, claiming your brain will actually reshape itself over time if you meditate, strengthening its 'rest and digest' ability; the section responsible for managing stress.

Mindfulness also improves your focus – extremely helpful at work. The benefits extend to streamlining your physical performance, sharpening your listening skills and structuring your eating habits.

By regularly taking time to collect yourself in the present moment, you'll develop better sleeping patterns, as you're not dumping the day's weight on your brain all at once! This can have huge benefits on your overall health, even your relationships.

BRINGING IT HOME

The easiest part of practicing mindfulness is actually doing it. Just concentrate on your breath and the space around you – you've got a natural guide right under your nose! Breathe in, breathe out. As little as 10 minutes. Daily.

The most daunting part of practicing mindfulness is doing nothing. No worrying. No planning. No screens. No outside interference. As you spend time simply existing, your mind will wander off, often without you noticing. Did I turn the oven off? I wonder what's for dinner tonight... A crucial part of mindfulness training is to reel your thoughts back to the present. Just like building physical muscle, your mental strength will grow each time you do this. In fact, it's that same mental resistance that stops people exercising when they should.

To bring meditation into your lifestyle, choose a specific location or time of day – a cue – to associate with working on mindfulness. This could be pre-breakfast, a portion of your lunch break in the park, or when taking a relaxing bath.

Your first few meditations may bring on an immediate sense of calm, but it's important to develop the habit. A good place to start is at the spa, where the atmosphere, treatments and surroundings are perfectly designed to help you relax and let go of your daily worries. Then, you can take that feeling of mindfulness and try to replicate it in your everyday life.

Meditation Myths:

- 1 Meditation is not a religion – it's simply a method of mental training
- 2 You don't have to sit cross-legged, hum or have dreadlocks to practice
- 3 It doesn't take hours – you can meditate in as little as 10 minutes
- 4 It's not a competitive sport – you can't fail or succeed, just give it a go!
- 5 You don't have to dedicate your life to it – just a few minutes can help

Why Meditate?

- 1 Practice anywhere, anytime
- 2 Improved focus
- 3 Creativity naturally develops
- 4 Sleep, eat and love better
- 5 Dissolves negative mental stress