

Last week's #mentalhealthawarenessweek highlighted the importance of the need to respect the health or fitness of our mind. And of course, one of the popular and effective techniques to achieve this is a mindfulness practice.

Mindfulness is the ability to stay in the present moment and being focused on what is happening here and now without dwelling on the past or jumping into the future. This ability to observe what is happening now allows us to build a greater awareness and enables us to make better choices, build stronger relationships, and remain calm among daily life's ups and downs. Mindfulness practice helps us to build better mental health habits which make us more productive, improve sleep and bring enjoyment to life on a very different level.

## **Incorporating mindfulness practices into your life.**

Given most of us have had over a year of self-isolation, the last thing I want to talk about is 'sitting on the cushion'. As a mindfulness teacher, I will always emphasise the importance of the informal mindfulness practices that can be easily adopted into daily routines especially if you are trying to fit the practice into a life that is trying to balance commitment to family, work, and friends.

Listed below are a few practices that we cover in greater depth through the process of inquiry and practice during the eight-week Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction course and at the very least gives you a glimpse of what can be done to bring balance without adding stress. These small practices can easily be incorporated into your daily life and are particularly important if you continue to work remotely and spend a lot of time in front of the computer screens.

1. **Mindfulness in daily activities** – there are lots of routine things that we do every day that we often do on autopilot or with the distraction of music or tv in the background like taking a shower, eating, brushing teeth, travelling/driving to work. We repeat these things so many times that we are no longer paying attention to what or how we do them. To break away from this process I would recommend bringing awareness to the task that you are doing and becoming interested in it anew, observing it with a

beginner's mind and noticing the thoughts and feelings that start to arise. And whatever you do, switch off the music or tv especially if you are eating and savour the food. The added bonus is that you will start eating more healthily and in smaller quantities as the satiation point will come earlier.

2. **Multitasking is a myth** - if you focus on one thing or task at a time you will complete it in shorter timeframe and with better quality. Allow yourself to be absorbed in that one task and see for yourself how many you accomplish in one day with that unwavering attention. Another good tip is to keep distraction to the minimum and if you get distracted with the beep of incoming email, bring your awareness back to the task in hand.
3. **Connect with nature and take a short walk outside** - take regular breaks from the computer screen and if you have this opportunity at least once a day try going outside to connect with nature. If possible, leave the phone, music, any other distraction at home (read again the above point about multi-tasking if in doubt) and enjoy and connect to things that surround you. Since I started doing this I have discovered so many things, plants, insects, smells, sounds that I have not noticed before. It enriches your awareness and calms the mind.
4. **Mindful communication** - life is too short to spend it looking at the phone screen and if you are talking or meeting someone, give them your full attention, really listen to what people have to say and pay attention to your responses - this type of communication reduces the conflict because this are less likely to be misinterpretations because your focus remained 100% throughout the conversation.
5. **Staying positive and practicing gratitude and compassion to self and others** - when we practice gratitude (and I honestly do that when I get the green light all the way home when cycling) we focus our attention on positive things in our lives, no matter how small, so regret then doesn't enter into our thoughts and we expand our hearts to express more kindness and compassion to people around us (and yes, that smile to the older lady that you met on the walk in point 3 above is important as it establishes the basis for the human connection). And when we practice compassion to ourselves, it stops us constantly judging, analysing and comparing ourselves to others, so we are truly in the present moment.

**It takes practice but I would urge you to give it a go. Or if you still struggle, please reach out to [MindfulnessUK At Work](#) and see what we can do together.**

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