

SHEET 2 Mindfulness

Most of us lead hectic lives and the resulting stress from juggling jobs, family, friends and children can mean we get out of the habit of paying attention to how we feel in our bodies. Research has shown that such stresses exacerbate pain conditions and that the regular practice of simple meditation and mindfulness techniques can help us to reduce pain and feel back in control of our lives. Meditation and mindfulness are very simple to practise and require no equipment, and just 10 minutes a day can make a big difference.

Mindfulness simply means being in the moment, i.e. a human being rather than a human doing! However, our 'monkey minds' are used to thinking 10000 things at once, so, like all skills, mindfulness and meditation need practice. Set aside a regular time every day to practise the simple exercise below and you will find it gets easier and easier to be in the moment. Just 10 minutes is all you need.

Mindfulness of breathing: taking 10 minutes for yourself

- Sit comfortably on a chair with your back straight, feet uncrossed and flat on the floor, your arms resting on your legs or in your lap on top of one another. Spend a moment to take in your surroundings with a soft focus.
- Now gently close your eyes and tune into the inner environment of your body.
- Become aware of the weight of your body, the contact between your body and the chair, and the sensation of the soles of your feet on the floor. Feel the weight of your hands and your arms resting on your legs or lap.
- Take a moment now to notice the sounds around you, both inside and outside the room. You don't need to grab onto or worry about the noises; just let the sounds be.
- Tune into the feeling of the air on your face and body; notice whether you are warm or cool.
- Now bring your attention gently to your breath, noticing where you feel the breath in your body. You don't have to worry about the breath or try and change it, just be aware. You might be able to notice the small movements that you don't usually pay attention to; maybe you feel them in your belly or your chest. There are no rights or wrongs, you are just gently observing. Follow the in breath and the out breath with your full attention, like the waves of the sea ebbing and flowing.
- After the next breath out just notice the slight pause, the stopping and the stillness before the next breath in. Just notice the quality and the rhythm of the pause and let the next breath in come when it wants to, almost like the breath is breathing you. You may find that as you notice the pause it naturally becomes longer.
- You may find it helpful to count the breaths.
- As you feel the rising sensation of the in breath you count 1.
- As you feel the falling sensation of the out breath you count 2 just silently to yourself.
- And you continue counting in that way up to 10: so it's 1 with the rise of the breath and 2 with the fall, 3 with the rise and continuing this way up to the count of 10. When you reach 10 just stop and start again at 1. Just try that 2 or 3 times through.
- Again, it doesn't matter if the mind wanders, it's quite normal, but as soon as you've noticed it has wandered, gently bring it back to the act of counting the breaths: stopping at 10 and starting again at 1.
- When you are ready, just bring your attention back to your body. Notice the physical sensation of your body pressing against the chair and then your feet resting on the floor and your hands and arms resting on your legs. Notice the sounds inside and outside the room and any obvious tastes, smells and sensations, so bringing yourself back to your senses and back to your immediate environment.
- In your own time bring yourself back into the room and open your eyes again.