

Mindfulness for Health Course Overview

Our Mindfulness for Health Course provides you with a wide range of mindfulness skills to ease the suffering associated with persistent pain, fatigue and ill health - whatever the cause.

There are two key principles which underlie all aspects of mindfulness and run through the Mindfulness for Health courses

- You will learn to live in the present moment and *breathe into* your experience, rather than tensing against it.
- You will learn to *respond* rather than *react* to your life's circumstances

Can Mindfulness help you?

Mindfulness is explored progressively over the course, gradually building up a rich awareness of yourself, as well as your relationship to others, enabling you to lead a more creative life, even when experiencing long-term pain or illness. Mindfulness is not so much a technique as a particular stance or attitude to life that we can all develop. This stance helps people with long-term conditions to come to terms with their situation, not by changing the condition itself but by changing their relationship to it. In a sense what this means is that the person becomes larger than their condition, with its pain and/or other unpleasant symptoms. The condition may remain just as intensely unpleasant, but it is held within a bigger container of awareness, with kindness and acceptance rather than harsh rejection and resistance.

Managing our response

Pain and illness are unpleasant sensations that we normally react to, causing a host of further problems and physical and emotional stress. We may not be able to do anything about the underlying unpleasant sensations, for example in the case of persistent pain or an incurable disease. But we can train ourselves to lessen or overcome this reactive cycle. This means that in time we learn to manage our response to the suffering we experience. The same principles apply to fatigue and stress, or any other difficulties.

Feeling in charge

All these methods of mindfulness can be practised on your own at home, enabling you to feel in charge of your own health and pain management. Gradually, over time, progress

can be made and confidence increased. The founder of mindfulness in medicine, Jon Kabat-Zinn, calls mindfulness work 'participatory medicine'. People who attend mindfulness courses do not sit passively while 'experts' treat them. Instead they participate in their own healing by practising mindfulness. In doing so they tap into their own inner resources, their own wisdom, and discover how to live well, even with a painful condition.

Who is the course for?

The course is open to all on a self-referral basis. So far we have welcomed people with conditions such as: chronic back pain, arthritis, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue, post-operative pain, cancer, nervous disorders, MS, Parkinson's disease, and other non-specific pain. This list is not exhaustive and we welcome your enquiry whatever your condition. Contact us if you are uncertain if this Mindfulness for Health course is right for you.

Mindfulness for Health Core Components

The course is based on the book *Mindfulness for Health* by Vidyamala Burch and Danny Penman.

Breath Awareness

We begin by investigating our breathing habits, so we can learn to use the natural breath as an aid to managing our pain, illness or stress. We encourage people to develop habits of breathing into their experience, learning how to use the breath to soften resistance to pain or illness and to let go of tension.

Body Relaxation

This body scan relaxation helps us to develop habits of greater ease and awareness of the body. Adopting a comfortable posture, lying down or sitting, we take our awareness through our whole body, using the breath to help us let go of areas of pain and/or tension. We give course participants a CD to use at home.

Mindful Movement

We guide you through some gentle movements, based on yoga and pilates, specially devised for Breathworks by a very experienced yoga teacher. The movements are suitable for all, being easily adapted as necessary so they are appropriate for people suffering from a wide range of physical conditions. We also discuss the importance of keeping our bodies

in as good physical condition as possible, in order to stop a cycle of disuse, loss of function and more pain or fatigue.

Mindfulness of Daily Life

By bringing awareness to the activities of daily life you will learn to overcome the very common tendency of overdoing it on good days or collapsing on bad days, with accompanying emotions of unrealistic hope followed by frustration and despair. You will be guided in some detective work about your daily activities, using diaries and symptom scoring, to try to become more aware of what activities cause aggravation. You will learn how to make choices throughout the day, based on your developing awareness, enabling you to have a more balanced approach to life.

Three Minute Breathing Space

This is a very effective way of coming back to an awareness of yourself in the midst of daily life. We will teach you how to take three minute breaks in the midst of whatever activity you are engaged with, when you can simply rest your awareness quietly with the breath. This can be a remarkably effective way of bringing a sense of calm, peace, and presence into your experience. Then, feeling refreshed and focused, you can go back to what you were doing.

Meditation Practices

During the course you will be introduced to seven different mindfulness meditations that build progressively on one another. These are all about 10 minutes long:

Body scan Meditation

Breathing Anchor Meditation

Mindful Movement Meditation

Acceptance and Self-Compassion Meditation

The Treasure of Pleasure Meditation

Open Heart Meditation

Connection Meditation