

Peace of Mind



Liz Nicholls on how to stop being a prisoner of your own unhelpful thought cycles

Stressed out by the frantic pace of modern life and churning anxieties about the future and the past? You're not alone. But, the best news is that the practice of mindfulness is a free, simple way to liberate your mind.

The Oxford Mindfulness Centre, based at the University of Oxford Department of Psychiatry, Warneford Hospital, is an international centre of excellence working with partners around the world to prevent depression and enhance human potential. The team, made up largely of researchers and teachers, are at the forefront of research and development in the field of mindfulness. There are mindfulness courses locally, some specifically designed for people with depression and anxiety disorders and available on the NHS, and others for members of the public and expectant parents interested in mindfulness-based childbirth and parenting programmes.

So, what is mindfulness? It's a translation of a word that means awareness. Most of the time our attention is hijacked by thoughts and emotions, concerns and desires, our hopes or worries for the future, and memories and regrets from the past. Mindfulness can help manage your thoughts and feelings, focusing on one moment at a time.

Nara Kronfli, owner of Cotswold Retreat in Alvescot, says: "The buzz over mindfulness is ever increasing; however the art of it has been practised for thousands of years. To be mindful is to be present in this moment. It can bring instant inner calm and also make us value each moment more and increase our gratitude for life. The benefits are vast and thanks to modern technology also supported with scientific evidence.

"As our outer world becomes increasingly chaotic and demanding we have almost forgotten how to savour a moment in time and appreciate how being present is a wonderfully liberating and calming experience.

"It is so simple to learn and I love being able to teach people how they can include it in daily practice..

"Mindfulness can come through observing something simple like the sound of the breeze through the trees or watching a child play. Learning various techniques you will find a way of being present in the moment and in that moment all is well and any chaos will become still.

"Imagine, not worrying about the past or the future, just being present...you don't need to imagine... it is here for you and once you learn how to practice it you have it for life..I like to think of it as you having a Martini moment, anytime, anywhere any place..and it's free!

Re-Vitalise have been running Buddhist-based tai chi and meditation retreats at Braziers Park in Oxfordshire, for 10 years. Andy Spragg, one of the owners and the senior tai chi teacher at Re-vitalise, said: "To make mindfulness a part of our lives and to experience the benefits, we must practise. The practice simply involves dwelling in the present, without the usual clutter of mental chatter.

"Sounds easy? It isn't. When the stressful situations which cause us pain kick in, we forget to be mindful. Retreat is important. It gives us an opportunity to practise, without our modern, crazy world invading."

Three steps to mindful thinking...

- **Switch off your screens**
Tech-addiction can be tough, but set aside a chunk of screen-free time, starting with a couple of hours
- **Keep a gratitude diary**
Making note of all that is good in your life can be a very useful habit for good mental hygiene
- **Remember the power of breathing**
Yoga, stretching and simple breathing techniques can calm a frenzied mind

Resources

- Visit www.oxfordmindfulness.org
- Read *The Power Of Now* by Eckhart Tolle
- Visit www.cotswoldretreat.co.uk
- Call the Samaritans on **08457 90 90 90**