

Mindfulness

Have you ever driven somewhere and realised when you arrived that you couldn't really remember anything about the journey? Or have you ever eaten a whole packet of biscuits when you were planning to only have one? Or have you stayed up much later than you planned, or even all night, watching 'just one more' episode of a TV series? All of these are examples of mindlessness. When we live this way, we are not fully awake and not fully living our lives.

When we are mindful, we are more conscious of our thoughts, our actions and what is happening around us. We might notice a beautiful sunset or really listen carefully to what a friend is saying, rather than planning what we're going to say next. We are also more aware of our own feelings and our thoughts. Jon Kabat Zinn, who has done a lot to make mindfulness popular, says mindfulness is: 'Paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and without judging.'

So we are consciously deciding what to pay attention to, we are not worrying about the past or planning for the future and we are not trying to control or stop our thoughts or feelings – we're just noticing them.

For most people life is getting busier and busier. Technology means that we always have something to do and there isn't much opportunity to just 'be'. People are often doing two or three things at the same time: texting while watching TV, or even looking at their phone while walking along the pavement. People are working longer hours and bringing work home. All this can make us stressed, and mindfulness can be a way of reducing this stress.

Research shows that mindfulness reduces stress and depression. It can help you to concentrate, have a better memory and to think more clearly. It can also help people to manage pain better and to improve their sleep, and it can even help you lose weight because you won't eat that whole packet of biscuits without thinking!