

An Introduction to Mindfulness

To be used with the Glasgow Pain Management
Programme Mindfulness CD

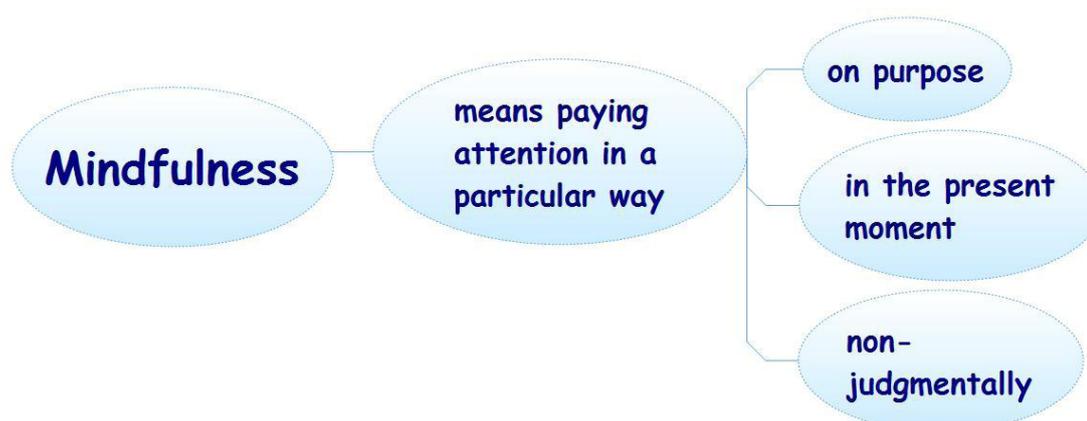


2017

Introduction

This brief manual should be used alongside the CD of mindfulness practices you were given at the pain clinic. The CD was originally designed to be used as a part of the Glasgow Pain Management Programme (PMP), which is why it contains some references to the group sessions of the PMP. This manual is intended to give you some background information about mindfulness, and pointers as to where to go next if you are interested in using mindfulness as a technique to help you manage and cope with your pain.

What is mindfulness?



Mindfulness is a very simple concept. Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally.

Although it is based on an ancient Eastern practice, mindfulness does not conflict with any beliefs or traditions, whether religious, cultural or scientific. It is simply a practical way to notice thoughts, physical sensations, sights, sounds, smells - anything we might not normally notice. The actual skills might be simple, but because this way of paying attention is so different to the way our minds usually behave, it can be difficult at first.

How do our minds usually behave? We tend to spend a lot of our time with our minds on 'auto-pilot' – too preoccupied with thoughts of the past or the future to be truly aware of what is going on around us, or even how

we are really feeling at any particular moment. It's probably true to say that for a large part of our lives we are not fully 'present' in the moment. And even when we do notice things around us, what we notice is coloured by our thoughts, experiences, and expectations. For example, imagine going out into the garden and looking around. You might notice your grass, but you are probably unlikely to just see it just as grass. Instead, your mind is likely to be filled with thoughts about it really needing cutting and what the neighbours might think of you if you let the garden get overgrown. A young child on the other hand, might see a profusion of colours and shapes, all the beauty of nature. Children naturally encounter the world around them with openness and curiosity, in a way that is often harder for us as adults to do. This way of encountering the world, with non-judgemental curiosity, is one of the things we try to cultivate with mindfulness.

The other problem with living life on 'auto-pilot' is that we are often unaware of how our thoughts cloud our feelings and how our feelings influence our thoughts. It is easy to get stuck in a mental rut, feeling hopeless or powerless to change. We often react to thoughts or feelings in a way that, if seen from the outside, would not appear the most sensible way to respond. We lose our temper with loved ones, give up plans in despair, avoid friends, and so on. Using mindfulness to examine our thoughts and feelings allows us to take a mental step backwards and avoid simply reacting to difficult situations.

A common type of mental rut is that of judging ourselves too harshly. When others behave in a certain way we often make excuses for them in a way that we wouldn't for ourselves. We give others the benefit of the doubt while judging ourselves in an unfavourable light – we are useless, weak, and so on. Again, taking a mental step back can be helpful, allowing us to see things more objectively, and to be kinder to ourselves.

What are the benefits of mindfulness?

- **Evidence that mindfulness helps with health problems**

Recent evidence suggests that mindfulness has many benefits, including increased ability to cope, relaxation, stress reduction, and improvement in concentration. It has recently been adapted for use in many health care settings, for example with stress and pain management.

- **Giving your mind a rest**

We are always thinking. Usually this isn't a problem, but at times the mind can get overwhelmed with stressful thoughts about the past and future.

We might replay painful experiences from the past, or imagine worst case scenarios about the future. It can be exhausting and is usually unproductive. On a basic level, paying attention to what is happening in the present moment can give the mind a rest from these stressful and habitual thought patterns.

- **Being kinder to yourself**

When we are feeling stressed, becoming more aware of our thoughts, feelings and sensations may not sound like an obviously helpful thing to do. But learning to notice our thoughts in a way that suspends judgement and self-criticism can have surprising results.

- **Becoming more flexible in your responses to experiences**

Most of us will occasionally find ourselves “swept away” by a current of thoughts, feelings, worries and pressures. When we are overwhelmed we are more likely to react to difficult situations in ways that can end up making things worse. Mindfulness can help develop an awareness of when this is happening and give you some more flexibility or choice in how you react.

- **Tuning in to your body**

With any chronic pain, it is easy to overdo things without realising it, later suffering as a result. If you are on ‘autopilot’ you won’t notice the early warning signs that you might be pushing too far or sitting too long in an uncomfortable position, or hunched up with tension. Mindful awareness of your body allows you to correct the problem before it develops into a painful flare-up.

- **Relaxation**

Although mindfulness isn’t intended as a relaxation therapy, it often produces a sense of inner calm and relaxation – for some people this is reason enough in itself to practice mindfulness. Some people find the technique particularly useful for insomnia.

- **Appreciating life**

Again, this isn’t the reason we recommend mindfulness, but there is no doubt that as you get into the habit of noticing the world around you, even the most mundane and familiar activities can become surprisingly enjoyable. There is a lot to be said for relearning the ability to see the world with a child-like sense of wonder.

How to get started with mindfulness

There are two types of mindfulness practice – ‘formal’ practice, usually guided meditations, and ‘informal’ practice, when you carry out an everyday activity in a mindful way – for example, eating. Formal practice trains the mind to pay attention in a mindful way, which makes informal practices easier to do. The CD you received with this manual includes three common formal mindfulness practices:

- Mindful Breathing Space
- Mindful Body Scan
- Broadening Awareness

It also contains tips for guided enquiry (reflection following mindfulness practice), and tips for incorporating mindfulness into everyday life.

Using the CD is an easy way to get started, but there is a wealth of material available online and in your local bookstore if you want to take your practice further. We have suggested a few websites, books and apps at the end of this manual.

The best way of learning mindfulness is in a group setting. Trained instructors can help guide you through the obstacles most people face when they try mindfulness for the first time. You will also learn from the experiences of others in the group. After trying some of the practices out for yourself, and learning more about mindfulness, you may want to take things further. The healthcare professional who you are seeing in the Pain Clinic can give you more information about mindfulness groups run by the Pain Service.

The challenges....

As mentioned above, mindfulness is a simple concept, but the state of mindful awareness doesn’t come easily. Changing long-established habits of thinking will always be difficult, however strong your motivation. You may find you end up avoiding opportunities to practice with excuses such as, ‘it’s too noisy here’, ‘I’m too tired now’, ‘there’s too much to do’....and so on.

You will probably find it difficult at first to sit quietly without any distractions; you may feel bored or even fall asleep!

You may find yourself distracted by thoughts and feelings or realise a few minutes into a practice that your mind has wandered. Recognising that this has happened is part of the process, and reflecting back on the content of the distracting thoughts is often enlightening.

The best thing to do when starting out is to adopt an attitude of curiosity and open-mindedness, and suspend judgment as to whether or not this will work for you. For most people, a few weeks of regular practice will be enough to notice a real difference. You will find that slipping into a mindful state becomes easier and happens faster. No-one ever 'masters' mindfulness – there will always be times when it is simply too difficult to get into the right frame of mind - but it certainly becomes easier with practice. And practising when it is easy to do so (no pain, anxiety, etc) means you are more likely to be able to call on the technique when you really need it.

Trying too hard

The most common mistake made by newcomers to mindfulness is that of trying too hard. We have in our minds an idea of what a 'mindful state' should be (serene, relaxed), and we try desperately to achieve this state, forcing out stray thoughts, willing our minds to empty. This process has been likened to trying to hold a beach ball underwater. No matter how hard you try, you can never will your mind to empty itself of distracting thoughts. The problem is that the harder you try, the more frustrated you become, and the harder it is to reach the state of calm you are trying to achieve.

This is the paradox of mindfulness – the harder you try, the less likely you are to succeed. Only by letting go can you begin to enter a meditative state of mind. Letting go in this case means not trying to change anything – the distracting thoughts, your sense of restlessness – just noticing that these thoughts and feelings are there, maybe looking at them from the perspective of a curious observer, and then moving on. Once you learn to do this, you will be amazed at the difference. When you stop **trying** to empty your mind, or to focus, the process begins to happen naturally. This makes perfect sense when you remember that mindfulness is not about trying to achieve anything, it is simply about **being aware** of what is going on in your mind and around you in the present moment.

Which leads us to the final important point – there is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to practice mindfulness. There is nothing you **should** be thinking, or feeling. Each individual will experience the process in a different way, and no two meditations will be exactly the same. If your practice has consisted

mostly of your noticing that your mind is full of stray thoughts, or that you are particularly uncomfortable or anxious, then that is fine – it doesn't mean your practice was a failure. The important thing is that you noticed these things, which in turn means that you were able to take a step back from your thoughts, feelings, etc. Be kind to yourself – don't criticise yourself for having failed. Once the anxiety that you are not doing mindfulness properly has passed, you will find that achieving a calm, relaxed state becomes much easier.

Where now?

If you want to find out more about mindfulness, there are several useful websites with good links, background information, further reading recommendations, etc. There is a bewildering amount of information out there, so we recommend starting with the first two sites for a good, general overview.

- **Mindfulnet.org:** <http://www.mindfulnet.org/>
- **Oxford Mindfulness Centre:** <http://www.oxfordmindfulness.org/>
- **Other useful sites:**
 - <https://www.mindandlife.org/>
 - <http://www.investigatinghealthyminds.org/>
 - <http://www.wisebrain.org/>
 - <http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/stress-reduction/>
 - <http://www.self-compassion.org/>
 - <http://www.freemindfulness.org/download>
 - <http://www.mindful.org/>
 - <http://www.sharonsalzberg.com/>
- **Palouse mindfulness** (www.palousemindfulness.com) offers a complete, free, online 8-week MBSR (mindfulness-based stress reduction) course, including audio, video and lots of supplementary reading. Highly recommended for those who want to investigate further:

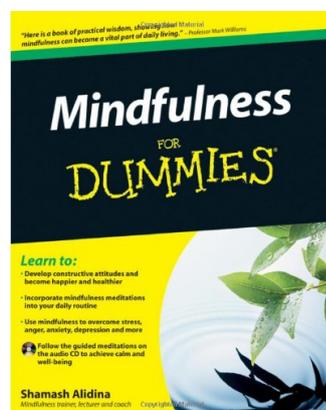
If you would like to continue your mindfulness practise in a group setting, your Pain Clinic healthcare professional can give you more information about

a course we run in the Pain Service. Outside of the NHS, there are several organisations offering groups and courses locally:

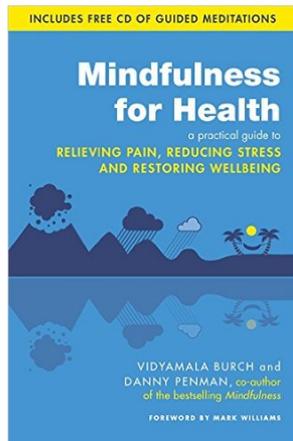
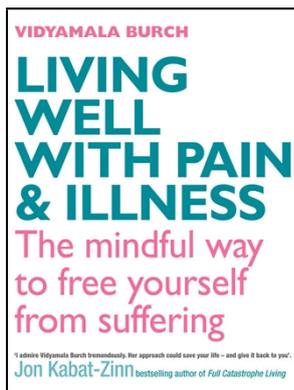
- **Glasgow Buddhist Centre** run a variety of Mindfulness based courses and can be contacted on 0141 333 0524 or www.glasgowbuddhistcentre.com
- **Mindfully Being** run mindfulness courses in Glasgow; www.mindfullybeing.co.uk
- **Mindfulness Today** – another local organisation offering courses in the West of Scotland: <http://www.mindfulnesstoday.co.uk/>
- **Breathworks** run courses nationwide, as well as producing CDs and books. More information can be found from <http://breathworks-mindfulness.org.uk/> or phone 0161 834 1110

- **Other Glasgow-based centres:**
 - <http://scotlandbuddhistvihara.blogspot.co.uk/>
 - <http://www.chooseself.com/>
 - <http://www.livingmindfulness.net/#!our-teachers/clqi>
 - <http://www.everyday-mindfulness-scotland.co.uk/>
 - www.glasgowmindfulnesscentre.co.uk/
 - <http://www.mindfulnessglasgow.com/>

Books about mindfulness

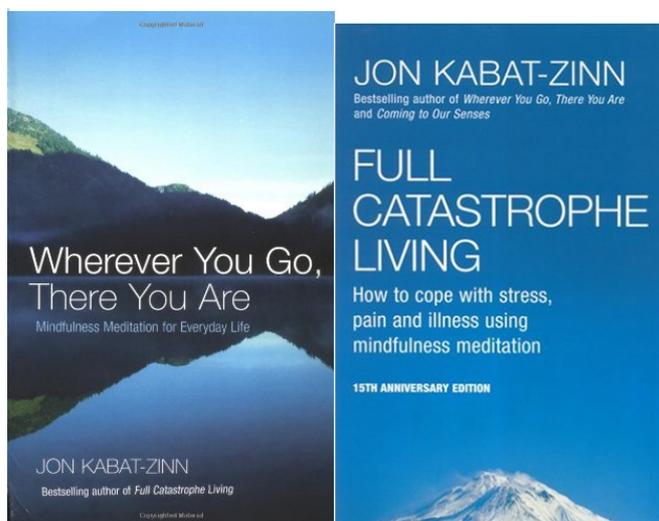


Mindfulness for Dummies (book comes with a CD; e-book also available, with downloads) by Shamash Alidina [2010]



- Living well with pain and illness. The mindful way to free yourself from suffering;
- Mindfulness and Health (includes CD)

Both by Vidyamala Burch, founder of breathworks, and both have a focus on mindfulness for chronic pain.



- Full Catastrophe Living: How to cope with stress, pain and illness using mindfulness meditation
- Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness meditation for everyday life

Both by [Jon Kabat-Zin](#), the 'father' of mindfulness in Western medicine – he first popularised the technique in the 80's, and is still a prolific writer and speaker on the subject. 'Wherever You Go...' is more of a general overview, 'Full Catastrophe Living' a more in depth look at mindfulness for pain and illness.

Mindfulness Apps and other resources:

There are plenty of mindfulness apps available for both iOS and Android

2 examples (tried and tested by PMP staff):

- **Insight Timer** – Free and paid for versions. A Mindfulness toolkit, including timers and a huge store of guided practices. Also possible to link to online community.
- **Headspace** – excellent, though expensive (free 10-day trial then monthly / yearly subscription). Works like a course of guided practices, includes lots of good animations to explain different practices. Also available online.

Mindfulness on YouTube

Lots of mindful meditations/ lectures/ TED talks /guidance.

Most of these are American – big names include Jon Kabat Zinn and Tara Brach. Mark Williams and Russ Harris are good UK speakers.

Your Notes

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