

How can we find relaxation in a stressful world?

Have you ever sat down for a cup of coffee to take five minutes out of your day to “relax”, only to finish the drink and realise you spent those five minutes inside your head somewhere completely different and often stressful?

Relaxation doesn't always beat stress just by letting your body sit still instead of rushing around. Relaxation begins when we exercise our mind to sit still instead of rushing around. It is after all only in the present moment, when we find it, that we can interact with the world around us, make decisions and act on the worries and thoughts we had in the past.

What is Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy?

Mindfulness is a Buddhist concept of allowing yourself to be completely aware of the present moment while treating yourself and your surroundings in a gentle and compassionate way. More than just being a nice idea, the practice of mindfulness can bring about opportunities for happiness, to re-engage with life, ourselves and the people around us. This has been supported by medical research and even validated in NICE guidance for medical practitioners – NICE guidance supports Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) as an effective way of reducing future episodes of depression in those who are prone to recurrent episodes.

MBCT combines mindfulness and the practice of meditation with the principles of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, providing the skills to apply the art of mindfulness to everyday life. The course involves a two hour weekly class over an eight week period, with the opportunity to practice mindfulness meditation at home with the help of guided CD's.

Who may benefit?

The course has gained increasing popularity around the world with many published studies supporting the benefit for people with chronic fatigue syndrome, cancer, chronic pain and even wound healing and relaxation for high blood pressure.

It can be of great benefit in dealing with the everyday stresses of life as well as helping to reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Recognise stressful thoughts when they arise

It's important to recognise when we are feeling stressed, as often we can ruminate and consider the same group of worries time and again. It is necessary that we can think of the past and the future in order to learn and to plan, but this can leave us short of time and energy to make change and take action. It can be useful to imagine a horizontal line in your mind. The middle of the line is the present moment, to the

right is the future and to the left is the past. Recognise where your mind has wandered to and bring your mind back to the middle, the present moment.

Acceptance

A key to moving on from life's stresses is the concept of "acceptance". This is not the same as giving up, forgetting or denying that the stressful thought or event exists, it is a means of living comfortably alongside the problem that can allow us to dissolve its grasp and steer our future in the direction we wish to travel.

Meditation- exercise for the mind?

The practice of meditation often starts with simple breathing exercises, becoming more aware of our body in the present moment. The act of focusing on our breathing helps to slow the heart rate and release endorphins, which enhance our sense of relaxation, while training our mind how to sit still and focus the flow of our thoughts. This is not dependent on any particular religious belief, and can be practiced in any quiet environment for a few minutes each day.

Like the string of a guitar which needs just the right level of tension to strike the right note, we use stress as a motivator to drive us forward towards our goals. However, in a world full of stress it's important for our health, wellbeing and ability to stay effective in our lives that we harness the skills to cope.

How to book a place?

For more information on Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy or to book a place for a free introductory evening at the forthcoming courses in London or Twyford in January 2010 please call 01962 718000 or email secretaries@doveclinic.com.