

Focus on Mindfulness

Sue, mindfulness convert and one of The Nightingale Cancer Support Centre's clients, gives us her take on the therapy in trend.

I was diagnosed with Hodgkin Lymphoma in January 2017 and one of the activities put forward to me by The Nightingale team was the mindfulness course, I had not done this before and was a little sceptical.

My life has always been 100 miles an hour. I juggled loads of activities, work, kids and I was even a scout leader. I have never really taken the time to think about who I am, where I am, or what I want to do because there was always the next thing to think about.

I didn't really know anything about mindfulness when I signed up to the course and to be honest, I was quite sceptical about it. So, I did a little bit of reading on it and decided to go into it open-minded. I've just completed an eight week course and have noticed the difference in myself already. Life feels a lot calmer and my mind feels a lot clearer.

I have returned to work and it's quite stressful, there are situations where previously I would have got really stressed and being awake all night worrying about it. The mindfulness course has helped me to cope with these situations. I think, "Do you know what, there are other things in life that are a lot more important than lying awake worrying about work."

What Anna (Mindfulness Teacher) tells us is that mindfulness is a work in practice and that it doesn't happen overnight. You've got to continue to embed mindfulness into your day.

Anna is great and has given us tape recordings of her voice which run through things like the body scan as well as the grounding and settling exercises. But if you don't have time to do those, you can still do mindful activities at home.

For example, when I used to walk the dogs, I used to think about what I had to do when I got home or what was happening at work that needed attention. I don't do that anymore. I take time to look at the trees, to hear the birds and take in the smell of flowers.

Seeing the benefits of being mindful encourages me to keep it up. I feel so much calmer. As a bonus, I met a fantastic bunch of people on the course. At the beginning, we discovered that all of us had been feeling isolated and lonely but quickly realised we're all in this together and subsequently, a strong bond developed between us all. I have made some good friends.

I would say to others who might feel sceptical about mindfulness to give it a go: it's changed my life.
Sue, Cancer Patient



Mind Full, or Mindful?

Mind Full or Mindful?

Anna Zannides is a mindfulness coach who has been working with The Nightingale Cancer Support Centre for the past two years.

Here she gives us some insight into the benefits of mindfulness and why it might be beneficial to cancer patients and also to the rest of us!



A beginners guide to the art of mindfulness.

The Nightingale had been looking for someone to run a mindfulness course as they thought it might be beneficial, so I did a couple of trials in the beginning to see what would work and now we are now running courses over a eight week period: one for cancer patients, one for carers and one for bereaved.

Going through cancer means that you experience trauma every day of your life and therefore learning how to cope and deal with that trauma is absolutely necessary. However, mindfulness isn't a talking therapy; it's about changing how the mind works beyond what you're dealing with right now, whether it's the cancer or the bereavement or the difficulties caring for somebody. Our clients learn that the mind is always active and is always thinking so instead of living in these constantly churning thoughts, allowing them to pull you along, we try to teach how to become the observer of your thoughts.

It takes time and practice, learning to accept that your thoughts aren't real and that they're not necessarily representing what's happening at THIS moment in time. These days there is a lot of scientific and psychological evidence proving that there is a very direct link between our emotional state and our physical state. If all of us can practice getting the emotional state balanced, our physical selves will be in a much healthier state.

- Take a couple of minutes to notice your breathing. Sense the flow of the breath, the rise and fall of your belly.
- Notice what you are doing as you are doing it and tune into your senses. When you are eating, notice the colour, texture and taste of the food.
- When you are walking, tune into how your weight shifts and the sensations in the bottom of your feet. Focus less on where you are headed.
- Don't feel that you need to fill up all your time with doing. Take some time to simply be.
- When your mind wanders to thinking, gently bring it back to your breath.
- Recognize that thoughts are simply thoughts; you don't need to believe them or react to them.
- Practise listening without making judgments.
- Notice where you tend to zone out (e.g., driving, emailing or texting, web surfing, feeding the dog, doing dishes, brushing teeth, etc.). Practise bringing more awareness to that activity.
- Spend time in nature.
- Notice how the mind likes to constantly judge. Don't take it seriously. It's not who you are.