

## **Finding more control in your busy life**

Do you find yourself rushing from one meeting to the next with no time to stop and think? Do interruptions mean you regularly don't do the preparation you need for productive meetings? Is your workload getting in the way of your productiveness?

When life is stressful and hectic the one thing we need is the ability to calm down, feel grounded and clear-headed. But too often we continue to rush from one thing to the next, multi-tasking in the hope that more doing will generate results. What we need to do is STOP and THINK. Mindfulness is proven to improve the quality of our thinking and interactions with others.

### **Mindfulness**

Mindfulness is about being fully awake, about being in the here and now, about being connected to the flow of every experience and enjoying a sense of oneness between mind and body. What is the opposite of mindfulness? It is feeling lost, feeling disconnected, feeling obsessed with the past, or fearing the future or maybe functioning in an 'automatic pilot' mode.

### **Mindfulness Exercises**

Try these exercises to bring the qualities of mindfulness into your working day. See which one(s) work best for you and then make it a daily practise, eg at the beginning of your day, or taking a minute or two before a meeting.

### **Sound Meditation**

Consciously adopt an alert, dignified yet relaxed body posture so you can feel comfortable without moving and stay with calm acceptance in the present. Now observe the sounds inside and outside this room also listening to the silences between the sounds without judging them, just accepting them.

### **Power of Breathing**

The breath is a very important ally in mindfulness meditation. With each breath we exchange carbon dioxide molecules from inside our bodies with oxygen molecules from the surrounding air. Waste disposal with each out-breath; renewal with each in-breath. There are a number of different places in the body where the breath can be observed: the nostrils, chest and stomach. No matter which location you choose to focus on, the idea is to be aware of the sensations, which accompany your breathing, and hold them in the forefront of your awareness. So we feel the temperature of the air as it flows in and out of the nostrils; we feel the movement of the muscles associated with breathing; we feel the abdomen moving in and out.

Paying attention to your breath means nothing more than paying attention. There are two major ways of practising mindfulness of breathing: one would be the formal discipline of making a specific time in which you practise a breathing meditation; the second is being mindful of the breath from time to time during the day wherever you are and whatever you're doing. Mindfulness of breathing is central to all aspects of meditation. It is used when practising 'sitting meditation', 'the body scan', yoga or 'walking meditation'.

If you time yourself for a minute and count the number of relaxed breaths you take in that time, you then have 1 unit of breathing mindfulness. You can manage your practice by simply deciding how long you have and then counting the relevant number of breaths.

### **The Body Scan Meditation**

One very powerful technique we use to re-establish contact with the body is the body scan. It involves lying on your back or sitting on a chair (relaxed but good posture) and moving your mind through the different regions of your body, just noticing how each feels. Start at your feet and work your way up to the head. At the same time we let our breathing move through the entire body from one end to the other. The idea in scanning your body is to feel each region you focus on and just stay there with your mind, breathing in and out. By the time we have completed the body scan we let ourselves dwell in silence and stillness. This is one of the most important mindfulness exercises for finding stillness and acceptance.

### **Mindfulness works**

Typical results include feeling less stressed, calmer, balanced and in a better mood. Other comments include: an improved breathing capability experienced by an asthma sufferer; showing more compassion and being less judgemental towards self and others; and getting less angry about inconveniences in life.

There is a well-known Zen saying, *“When you walk just walk, when you eat, just eat.”*

Mindfulness is an ongoing practice. There are opportunities when we can use day-to-day activities as a cue to practising mindfulness. The recommendation is to choose at least one formal meditation daily. The goal is to stay in the moment, to be non-judgemental, to decrease emotional arousal and achieve inner calm.