

Mindfulness & its benefits **- The Sharpham Trust**

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness means maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment.

Mindfulness also involves acceptance: paying attention to our habitual thoughts, our feelings and emotional patterns without judging them, or believing that there's a 'right' or 'wrong' way to think or feel in a particular moment.

Being able to observe rather than react to those patterns can really help to manage stress and enhance our sense of well-being.

When we practice mindfulness, our thoughts tune into what we're sensing in the present moment rather than revisiting the past or imagining what might happen in the future.

Though it has its roots in Buddhist meditation, a secular practice of mindfulness has entered the mainstream in recent years, in part through the work of Dr Jon Kabat-Zinn and his Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programme and Professor Mark Williams, of Oxford University's Cognitive Therapy Centre.

Dr Jon Kabat-Zinn defines mindfulness as "paying attention on purpose in the present moment, non-judgmentally...rather than being at the mercy of our own emotional reactions, crazy thoughts and fears".

The NHS, the Mental Health Foundation and the National Institute of Clinical Excellence recommend mindfulness as a way to treat depression, anxiety, stress and pain.

What are the benefits of mindfulness?

There is a growing body of evidence that demonstrates the positive effects of mindfulness.

- Mindfulness meditation has been shown to affect how the brain works and even its structure.
- People undertaking mindfulness training have shown increased activity in the area of the brain associated with positive emotion – the pre-frontal cortex – which is generally less active in people who are depressed.
- More than 100 studies have shown changes in brain wave activity during meditation and researchers have found that areas of the brain linked to emotional regulation are larger in people who have meditated regularly for five years.
- Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy can, on average, reduce the risk of relapse for people who experience recurrent depression by more than 40%
- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction has been developed and studied since the 1970s for its impact on mental health, producing reductions in anxiety (by 58%) and stress (40%)
- Individuals with "problematic" levels of stress found significant improvement in perceived levels of stress over a mindfulness course.
- Mindfulness learning is a cost-effective and accessible treatment for individuals.

(Source: The Mental Health Foundation)

Retreats and courses

The Sharpham Trust offers 1-Day Introductions to Mindfulness, 8-week courses in Mindfulness for Health & Well-being, individual mindfulness events and workshops as well as mindfulness retreats in Sharpham House, at The Barn Retreat Centre and in Sharpham's tranquil woodland.

More information and how to book

For more information on Sharpham Trust courses, retreats and events, visit www.sharphamtrust.org. To book a place on a mindfulness course, call **01803 732542** or email bookings@sharphamtrust.org

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