

'BEFORE THE COURSE,  
MY MIND WAS CONSTANTLY  
WORKING – I COULDN'T  
SHUT IT OFF. NOW I'M  
ABLE TO FOCUS ON  
THINGS MORE. I HAVE  
BECOME A LOT MORE  
CONFIDENT, MORE  
COMFORTABLE IN MY SKIN.

I ALSO USED TO HAVE  
PROBLEMS SLEEPING  
BUT NOW I'M ABLE TO GO  
TO SLEEP QUITE EASILY.

I USE THE MINDFULNESS  
PRACTICES IF MY MIND  
STARTS TO RACE, OR  
ANALYSE AND THINK  
TOO MUCH. WHEN I HAVE  
A PANICKY FEELING I CAN  
CALM MYSELF DOWN  
AND RELAX.'

Carla Linley  
London

# MIND FUL NESS...

## Q&A PATIENTS

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Mental Health Foundation

# MINDFULNESS A GUIDE FOR PATIENTS

**'MY DEPRESSION  
COMES FROM GETTING  
OVERWHELMED WITH  
DIFFICULT FEELINGS,  
WHETHER IT'S PAIN  
OR FRUSTRATION  
OR IRRITABILITY.'**

**'SINCE DOING  
THE MINDFULNESS  
COURSE I DON'T  
FEEL OVERWHELMED  
BY EVERYTHING  
I DON'T GET SO SUCKED  
INTO BLAMING AND  
JUDGING MYSELF.  
I'D RECOMMEND  
IT TO EVERYBODY.'**

Kathy Andrews  
Oxford

## Introduction

This booklet explains how people who have suffered from depression can benefit from a new treatment called Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT).

MBCT is a weekly course of classes taught over two months — it teaches people how to manage their thoughts and feelings in a way that makes depression less likely to occur. The techniques are based on simple meditation and yoga practices that are thousands of years old and which have been refined by expert psychologists.

Over recent years, Mindfulness has been scientifically tested and proven to help people deal with a range of illnesses, including chronic pain and anxiety, as well as improving our physical and mental health more generally. It is especially effective at helping people who have had depression more than once before.

## What is depression?

The term depression is used to describe a range of moods and behaviours — from low spirits to a severe problem that interferes with everyday life.

People who are depressed often lose their appetite and have difficulty sleeping, feel guilty or worthless, become anxious and tired, or find it difficult to concentrate. Most people experience some of these symptoms at some point in their life — they are part of the normal ups and downs of modern day living.

However, when someone feels depressed these symptoms can last for several weeks or more and significantly affect their ability to manage their lives. This kind of 'clinical' depression is very common — it affects around one in six people at some point in their life.

## What causes depression?

There is usually no one single reason why people become depressed. Stressful life situations can often bring on an episode, but some of us are more prone to depression than others.

Research suggests that people who get depressed are more likely to fall into negative patterns of thinking and behaviour when faced with stressful situations and these patterns can tip them into depression. They then often churn things over and over in their minds, trying to 'think' their way out of their problems. Unfortunately, thinking in this way usually makes the depression worse.

## How can MBCT help people who are prone to depression?

MBCT helps people train their minds to deal with stressful experiences in a different way. Rather than getting caught up in negative thoughts and behaviours, Mindfulness helps people to become more aware of what's happening in their minds and bodies, giving them the chance to respond differently. It teaches people to become more aware of the early warning signs of depression and deal with them effectively.

Taking a MBCT course can help make your mind stronger and more flexible — just as physical exercise can make the body healthier. Mindfulness is mental exercise that can strengthen the mind.

## Can Mindfulness work for me?

Scientific research shows that when people who have experienced several episodes of depression take a MBCT course, they are much less likely to relapse after the course. However, just as training your body takes time and effort, so training the mind also takes motivation and commitment. To benefit from Mindfulness, you need to be willing to do some homework each day during the course, as well as being willing to try some meditation and yoga practices.

## If Mindfulness means learning how to meditate, do I need to be religious or 'spiritual' to take an MBCT course?

No. Mindfulness is simply a way of training the mind — it doesn't require any religious or spiritual beliefs and none are taught on the course. Mindfulness is suitable for and can help people with any religious beliefs, or people with none at all.

## Can my GP 'prescribe' Mindfulness for me?

GPs can refer patients to MBCT on the NHS. However, whether your GP will be able to refer you depends on whether there are MBCT courses running in your area. Why not ask your GP for more information?

## What can I do if my GP says they do not have access to a Mindfulness course?

If your GP says they can't refer you to MBCT, it may be worth contacting your local Primary Care Trust to ask if they offer any courses.

Mindfulness is also becoming more available outside of NHS settings — there are courses privately run by trained Mindfulness teachers available in many areas and they are often inexpensive. As well as MBCT, there's a very similar course designed to help people deal with stress, called Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR).

You can find out about Mindfulness courses being offered in your area by logging onto [www.bemindful.co.uk](http://www.bemindful.co.uk). This website is an online database of courses throughout the UK and also includes more information on Mindfulness, podcasts and videos of people who use Mindfulness to help them.

## Can I learn Mindfulness on my own?

Mindfulness is most effectively taught on a course with a trained teacher. However, if there are no courses available in your area, there are some useful books on Mindfulness which may help.

Try *The Mindful Way Through Depression: Freeing Yourself From Chronic Unhappiness* by Mark Williams, John Teasdale, Zindel Segal and Jon Kabat-Zinn, which also includes CDs with guided Mindfulness practices you can try at home.

For a more general overview of Mindfulness, try *Full Catastrophe Living*, by Jon Kabat-Zinn.

## Can Mindfulness work for me if I'm feeling depressed at the moment?

Mindfulness is usually recommended for people who are not currently experiencing depression but have done in the past as a way to help prevent further episodes. However, there is some evidence that MBCT can also help people who are currently depressed. If you feel like Mindfulness could help you it is worthwhile attending a course and finding out if this approach works for you.

## Can Mindfulness help people with other health problems?

Yes. Mindfulness has been shown to be useful for people with conditions ranging from stress, anxiety, insomnia and fatigue, to eating disorders, psoriasis and even physical health problems. Trials have also shown it can boost the immune system and help us heal from illness faster.

## Can Mindfulness help me if I don't suffer from depression or feel ill at the moment?

Yes. Mindfulness is a way of bringing our minds and bodies into better balance and is shown to be helpful for our general health.

Mindfulness has also been shown to help people who have difficulties paying attention, enabling them to be more engaged in their work and enjoy better relationships. It can help us deal better with the everyday stresses of living and improve our well-being generally.

Practising Mindfulness may be able to help all of us enjoy better health now and in the future.