

Mindfulness – What's it all about? FOCUS!? LIVING IN THE MOMENT!

Mindfulness seems to be the new buzzword these days. "5 ways to live in the now" "7 ways to be present" "Are you living in the moment?" "4 ways to be mindful at work" You can't avoid the explosion of articles extolling the virtues of mindfulness and telling you it is the key to happiness, well-being and an altogether more fulfilling life. It is being hailed as a cure for all sorts of problems such as addiction, anxiety, depression and chronic pain to name but a few. The problem is, mindfulness is becoming so "fashionable" in the media it's in danger of being seen as another fad or quick-fix self-help cliché, which would be a terrible shame as the effects of mindfulness are actually quite profound.

So what exactly is mindfulness and how does it work?

A lot of people confuse mindfulness with meditation and although both can achieve similar beneficial effects, the two are actually different. You can actually do a form of meditation called "mindful meditation" but essentially, meditation is about setting aside time for intentional practice of quieting the mind. It is done in silence and involves focusing on a specific thing, such as the breath, an object or a concept, for example, compassion or forgiveness.

Mindfulness in the true sense of the word is simply about awareness or paying full attention to what is going on in any given present moment. In the words of Jon Kabat-Zinn – the scientist who first popularized the concept of mindfulness in western society – mindfulness is "paying attention in a particular way, on purpose in the present moment, non-judgmentally"

Mindfulness involves focusing exclusively on what is happening in the present moment – either in the external world or our own internal world of thoughts and feelings. It is about really observing life as it actually is, not what we imagine it to be. Think about the last time you were sitting in traffic or on the train on the way to work. Where are your thoughts? Thinking ahead to what you need to get done that day or thinking about what happened before you left the house? How about the last time you had dinner or coffee with a friend? Were you really paying attention to what they were saying, or how they might have been feeling? or were you making up stories in your head about what they were thinking or how they might be judging you? Did you really savour the smell and taste of the food you were eating? Or were you thinking about something that had happened a couple of hours earlier?

We spend so much of our lives thinking about the past, thinking about the future, worrying about what others are thinking about us, and reacting automatically to events, that we don't actually experience or feel many of our experiences. The cumulative result of all this mindlessness is a feeling that we are not actually in our lives or chronic feelings of emptiness and disconnection.

Mindfulness is about slowing down and bringing our attention to the present, and actually experiencing our life as it unfolds. It means noticing our thoughts and our feelings, noticing our reactions to events, noticing the sounds, smells, and sights going on around us, without judging them as necessarily good or bad.

MINDFULNESS IS ^{NOT} JUST ANOTHER FAD, IT'S A WAY OF PROFOUNDLY CHANGING OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE WORLD OURSELVES. IT'S ABOUT BRINGING AN OPENNESS & CURIOSITY TO ALL THAT WE EXPERIENCE SLOWING DOWN & ALLOWING LIFE TO TRULY TOUCH US