

# Mindfulness for Health

*A free 8 week course (2.5 hours weekly)  
for anyone living with a physical health condition*

## What is the Mindfulness for Health course?

Mindfulness for Health is a **free** 8 week course which has been developed to help people living with the effects of physical health conditions.

Living with a health condition can be difficult. We can experience pain or other distressing symptoms. We may also feel stressed and frustrated when health limits our life. Anxiety and depression are natural responses to this, often adding to the challenges we face.

The Mindfulness for Health course teaches simple practices which you can build into daily life, to help you to manage and live with your health condition and reduce problems such as stress, anxiety, low mood and pain.

The course is taught in a small group and meets once a week.

Sessions last for 2.5 hours, with regular breaks.

Home practice is an important part of the course and you will be invited to repeat exercises at home on most days throughout the eight weeks. A course handbook and audio recordings of exercises will be provided. You will need to commit 20-40 minutes per day for home practice to benefit fully from the course.

## What is “Mindfulness” and how can it help?

“Mindfulness” means being *aware of our experience in the present moment, just as it is*. Mindfulness meditation is a type of awareness or attention training which can help us to relate more effectively to our day to day experiences.

All of us can get caught up in our inner world of thoughts and emotions and lose touch with the here and now.

This can be a problem when we are experiencing health challenges. For example, we may find ourselves comparing our life now with how it was in the **past** and end up feeling low, angry or frustrated. At other times we might get caught up in worrying about how things will be for us in the **future** and end up feeling stressed or anxious.

Mindfulness skills can help us to become more aware of this happening so we can let go of unhelpful thinking and spend more time in the **present moment**.

Practising mindfulness can help us to notice the way we think and feel and this can change the way we manage and react to pain and other health symptoms, giving us a valuable tool to stay mentally healthy, whatever is happening with our body.

## How will I learn Mindfulness skills?

The course teaches mindfulness through a number of simple meditation practices. “Meditation” here is not a religious activity. Rather, we can think of it as awareness training. We are practising paying attention in a particular way, learning to have more choice about what we pay attention to and how we react to our experiences.

### 1. The Body Scan

Paying attention to the sensations we notice in all the different parts of the body in turn. This is usually done lying down, but can also be done sitting or standing.

### 2. Mindful Movement

We introduce a variety of gentle movements and stretches which can be done in lying, sitting or standing positions. The emphasis is on noticing how our body feels as it moves, although the gentle movement can also help to reduce stiffness and muscle tension.

### 3. Sitting Meditation

Paying attention to a particular focus such as the breath or sounds. We try to notice whenever our mind wanders away and gently bring our attention back as often as we need to.

### 4. Everyday Mindfulness

We bring attention to what we are doing right now in an everyday activity (such as walking, making a drink or eating) bringing our attention back whenever we notice that it has wandered.

Through these exercises we can learn to tune in to how our body really feels, which can help us to know more clearly what it needs. We can also learn how to relate to uncomfortable sensations, such as pain or other health symptoms, in a new way so that they cause us less distress.

The exercises also help us to notice our thinking and how this affects our emotions, our behaviour and our health symptoms. With practice, we can learn how to let go of unhelpful thinking and develop new ways of looking after ourselves.

## What is the evidence that Mindfulness is helpful?

Mindfulness training is an evidence-based treatment, recommended by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) as an effective way of reducing the risk of depression. It has also been shown to have a wide range of additional benefits for people with physical health conditions, through thousands of scientific research papers.

### Clinical Trails show that regular Mindfulness meditation is linked with:

- Reduced **anxiety, stress, depression, fatigue** and **irritability**.
- Reduced experience of **pain**

- **Improved immune system** function and **reduced inflammation**.
- **Improved heart and circulatory health** through **reducing blood pressure** and the risk of hypertension.
- Improved **control of blood sugar in type II diabetes**.
- Improved **skin clearing rates in psoriasis**

The benefits of mindfulness are being recognised across society and it is now taught and practised in many settings.

By October 2015, around 200 MPs had attended an 8 week mindfulness course taught in the houses of parliament and a **government paper**, *Mindful Nation UK*, was published, calling for mindfulness courses to be made more widely available. The paper highlighted the value of mindfulness courses for people with long term health conditions.

If you would like to read more about the benefits and science of mindfulness, you can find links on the “Mindfulness for Health” webpage on the IAPT website [www.iaptsheffield.shsc.nhs.uk](http://www.iaptsheffield.shsc.nhs.uk)

### **What do people say about the course?**

*“I feel less anxious and have become calmer and more relaxed, which is not only benefiting me, but also my family.”*

*“I can cope a lot better with my moods and reactions to situations”*

*“I am in control of my thoughts – they don’t control me”*

*“I feel much more able to deal with my pain now”*

*“I’ve learned a lot more about focussing on my well-being and improving my health rather than thinking about all the things that have gone wrong in my life.”*

*“The group was very supportive and stopped me feeling so alone – it helps to know that I’ m not the only one who feels like this ”*

*“What I expected from the course was nowhere near the sheer amount that I got out of it. I do not exaggerate when I say that it has not only changed my relationship with Fibromyalgia, but it has also changed my life.”*

## Is the Course suitable for me?

- The course is suitable for people with a physical health condition, including those with pain, fatigue or reduced mobility.
- To benefit fully, it is important that you are able to attend the 8 sessions and complete the home practice tasks.
- Venues are chosen to be as accessible as possible for people with reduced mobility, including accessible toilet facilities.
- We will always do our best to adapt the course to meet the needs of everyone who is taking part (for example, we can arrange more frequent breaks or modify movement exercises).

## Is the course Difficult?

- It can feel like a big commitment to attend the course and make time to complete the daily practices.
- Some of the mindfulness practices may feel challenging or uncomfortable to begin with, although we encourage you to stick with the practice as best you can, as the experience often changes over time.
- The group is a safe and supportive environment and there are many opportunities to discuss any difficulties you might have. Learning how to deal with difficult experiences in a new way is an important part of the course.
- The course facilitators can offer you support and advice. They are experienced health professionals, with specialist training in mindfulness and a commitment to daily mindfulness practice in their own lives.

## When is the Course NOT recommended?

The course may not be suitable:

- If you know you will not be able to **attend at least 6 of the 8 sessions** (for example due physical symptoms, health appointments, anxiety or low mood).
- If your health status, diagnosis or treatment has changed very recently.
- If you have experienced trauma, abuse, significant recent loss, major life changes, or addiction to substances.

In these circumstances, it may be advisable to wait until things have settled down enough to allow you to fully benefit from the course, or you may wish to try an alternative form of help or therapy.

We recommend that you discuss this with a course facilitator or the professional who recommended the course to you.

## **What if I have more questions or I'm not sure if the course is for me?**

We run an **Introductory Session** the week before each course starts.

This gives you a chance to hear more about the course, try out some mindfulness exercises and ask any further questions you may have.

We hope that this session will help you decide if you would like to attend the full course.

If you would like to ask questions or discuss any issues **before** the Introductory session, please phone or email our reception team who will arrange for a course facilitator to call you back.

## **How do I book a place on the Course?**

Courses run regularly in central locations.

You can contact our Admin team on (0114) 271 6568 to book your free place.

Alternatively, you can email us at [healthandwellbeing@shsc.nhs.uk](mailto:healthandwellbeing@shsc.nhs.uk).