

Frequently Asked Questions

I'd like to come on the course, but really can't afford it, are there any free places?

The 8-week courses are usually attended by people who pay the full fee. I can arrange payment terms that will help you to spread the cost of your place where this would be helpful. Occasionally, I offer free or subsidised places. If you feel that your circumstances may make you eligible for a free place please contact me and I'll consider reducing or waiving the fee in cases of genuine hardship.

Do I need any special clothes or equipment?

You'll need to wear something that's not too tight, so that you can move and breathe comfortably. Most of the practices you will do seated in a chair. We practice breathing meditation, sitting, walking, mindful movement and a body-scan, which is usually practiced lying down. You'll need to bring a rug or towel or yoga mat to lie on during class 1 and 3 but I'll remind you the week before the class. At all times you'll be offered the choice of whatever position is best for you.

Do I need to be physically fit to do the course?

No. All the practices are designed to suit all levels of physical ability and mobility. The aim is to notice the body and the breath in stillness and in movement, rather than to move in any particular way, or achieve anything. You can, for example, do the mindful movement exercises sitting on a chair and you will be given guidance on how best to adapt any activity to your own needs.

I have asthma and sometimes I get anxious about my breathing. Will I be able to meditate?

Although we will use the breath as a focus of attention sometimes, I encourage noticing the breath "as it is" rather than trying to achieve any particular type of breathing. Sometimes, I'll suggest a different focus (maybe the sensations in the soles of the feet) so that you can shift your attention when you feel that would be best. Please ask more about this when we have our telephone call before you start the course if it is a concern.

What shall I read to prepare myself for the course?

The course is experiential, you learn the practices together with the others in the group, and practice them at home using guided meditations. You will be given a handout each week as a reminder of what we've covered in the session. You'll have the option of reading or referring to resources that I will provide.

Will it help me to relax or to sleep better?

People who have completed the course say that what they have learned has helped in various ways, sometimes finding new responses to symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress, physical illness and pain. There are also some reports of increased energy, self-esteem and confidence, as well as improvements in relationships with

others. We make no promises, as it depends on lots of factors, but turning up, doing the practice and keeping an open mind can bring about some interesting developments.

What sort of people will be on the course?

Participants on our courses are drawn from all walks of life, adults who have identified a need to learn a more mindful approach. Many people are looking for new ways to respond to difficulties such as anxiety, pain and illness, or to particular stressors such as work, family or relationships, or maybe a wish to become a more mindful professional, manager or parent. What brings you here is less important than your commitment to practice and learn. Our shared humanity and the differing perspectives and experience in the group usually prove to be a significant source of support and learning.

Is there any religious or spiritual aspect to the course?

Mindfulness practice originates from the Buddha's teachings and is some 2,600 years old. Over the past thirty years mindfulness has been brought to the West and put to the scientific test. My courses are based upon ancient wisdom and modern science combined. There is no religious content. You can be Christian, Atheist or Buddhist or have any other religious belief and still benefit from these practices. The emphasis here is on what you do and not on what you believe.

My head is so full of thoughts, what if I can't meditate?

Meditation is not necessarily about getting rid of thoughts. Thinking goes on all the time. Sometimes it's helpful (like when you are concentrating on writing a shopping list or a report) and sometimes it's not (like when you're trying to read a book and your mind keeps wandering off to worry). Our aim is to develop a different relationship to the "uninvited" thinking. To respond to it rather than react and to avoid getting pulled into long trains of thought that affect our moods and behaviour. I'll be teaching this as part of the course and as wandering thoughts come in time and time again, we'll get plenty of practice.

Does it matter if I don't have time to practice between sessions?

You will be asked to practice up to 30 minutes every day for the duration of the course and will need to commit to finding the time and space to do this, or defer until a more suitable time. The course without regular practice is not likely to be helpful. I'll also invite you to carry out some tasks as part of your daily routine, although these won't be extra to what you normally do in a day. For example, I might ask you to choose a routine activity, such as making a cup of tea and do it mindfully (I'll teach you how to apply mindfulness to activities in week 1).

I might have to miss some sessions, will that matter?

Each session is different, so it's far better to plan to do the course when you can attend all the sessions. I know that life isn't always predictable, though, and if you have to miss a session through some emergency or illness, we'll work around that as best we can.

If I miss a session, can I go to that session when you're running another course?

Each group's development is different and can be affected by a new person joining, so I don't invite participants to cross from one course to another. However, if you have had to drop out of a course before the mid-way point due to significant illness or bereavement, I will offer you a place on an alternative course in the future if there are places available.

Will I have to tell everybody about myself and why I'm there?

You'll be asked to say your name at the beginning of each session, and will have the chance to take part in discussions about the meditation we are practicing together, and what we are learning from it. You will never be asked to tell your story, or made to feel that you have to share any personal information with the group. Indeed, we tend to step out of the story of our lives, and use the sessions to explore the here and now, and the potential for new ways of responding to life's ups and downs.

Are there any written assignments? Is there any writing to do in sessions?

Writing is optional. There are no written assignments. If you do choose to make written notes about your practice you can. They can act as a useful reminder of anything you want to talk about in the group (or for future reference).

How many people will be in the group?

There will usually be no less than 5 and no more than 12 people in a group.

Is mindfulness right for everyone?

Like any other course of learning, there are times when it may be easier or more difficult to take it all in, depending on what is happening in your life, and what challenges you are facing.

Whilst mindfulness is a helpful response to many difficulties, the course can be challenging. Applicants who have had bereavements, major traumas or transitions in the past 12 months are usually advised to wait a little longer, as part of the course encourages "turning towards" difficulty, and this may interfere in the healthy processing of loss or grief.

Experience has shown that meditation practice is difficult to sustain for people who are currently dependent on substances, including alcohol, although it can be a helpful approach to support those who have experienced dependency in the past.

I would also recommend that anyone currently experiencing acute depression might be best to wait until this has settled or is being successfully managed with medication. Those experiencing chronic relapsing depression may benefit from attending between depressive episodes in order to reduce the likelihood of future episodes.

How do I get on to a course?

For all our 8-week courses in Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction, you will need to complete an application form. I'll then contact you by phone to discuss your application and to talk through the course with you. You'll then need to provide a \$100 deposit to confirm your place.

What about when the course finishes?

When you have completed a course you will be offered the opportunity to monthly refresher classes so that you can continue to practice with others and be supported in developing mindfulness in your daily life and work.