

How mindfulness helps mental wellbeing

Becoming more aware of the present moment can help us enjoy the world around us more and understand ourselves better.

When we become more aware of the present moment, we begin to experience fresh things that we have been taking for granted.

"Mindfulness also allows us to become more aware of the stream of thoughts and feelings that we experience," says Professor Williams, "and to see how we can become entangled in that stream in ways that are not helpful.

"This lets us stand back from our thoughts and start to see their patterns. Gradually, we can train ourselves to notice when our thoughts are taking over and realise that thoughts are simply 'mental events' that do not have to control us.

"Most of us have issues that we find hard to let go and mindfulness can help us deal with them more productively. We can ask: 'Is trying to solve this by brooding about it helpful, or am I just getting caught up in my thoughts?'

"Awareness of this kind also helps us notice signs of [stress](#) or [anxiety](#) earlier and helps us deal with them better."

Mindfulness is recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) as a way to prevent [depression](#) in people who have had three or more bouts of depression in the past.

See the NICE guideline on [depression in adults](#).

How to be more mindful

Reminding yourself to take notice of your thoughts, feelings, body sensations and the world around you is the first step to mindfulness.

Notice the everyday

"Even as we go about our daily lives, we can notice the sensations of things, the food we eat, the air moving past the body as we walk," says Professor Williams. "All this may sound very small, but it has huge power

to interrupt the 'autopilot' mode we often engage day to day, and to give us new perspectives on life."

Keep it regular

It can be helpful to pick a regular time – the morning journey to work or a walk at lunchtime – during which you decide to be aware of the sensations created by the world around you.

Try something new

Trying new things, such as sitting in a different seat in meetings or going somewhere new for lunch, can also help you notice the world in a new way.

Watch your thoughts

"Some people find it very difficult to practice mindfulness. As soon as they stop what they're doing, lots of thoughts and worries crowd in," says Professor Williams.

"It might be useful to remember that mindfulness isn't about making these thoughts go away, but rather about seeing them as mental events.

"Imagine standing at a bus station and seeing 'thought buses' coming and going without having to get on them and be taken away. This can be very hard at first, but with gentle persistence it is possible.

"Some people find that it is easier to cope with an over-busy mind if they are doing gentle [yoga](#) or [walking](#)."

Name thoughts and feelings

To develop an awareness of thoughts and feelings, some people find it helpful to silently name them: "Here's the thought that I might fail that exam". Or, "This is anxiety".

Free yourself from the past and future

You can practice mindfulness anywhere, but it can be especially helpful to take a mindful approach if you realise that, for several minutes, you have been "trapped" in reliving past problems or "pre-living" future worries.