The Benefits of Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the practice of focusing on one’s immediate actions and surroundings, and accepting what’s happening without judgement. The benefits of this practice have been recognised and appreciated by spiritualists for millennia, a view now being firmly backed by modern science. Through a series of independent studies carried out between 2010 and 2015 by groups such as Harvard University and The American Psychological Association, mindfulness has been scientifically proven to significantly [reduce anxiety](https://www.google.ie/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUKEwiP-Kv3kt_XAhWIB8AKHdFrBw8QFggtMAA&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.health.harvard.edu%2Fblog%2Fmindfulness-meditation-may-ease-anxiety-mental-stress-201401086967&usg=AOvVaw3TRCNpKTqmjHcBs0EPvCQB), [prevent and treat depression](http://www.apa.org/monitor/2015/03/cover-mindfulness.aspx), [increase body satisfaction](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1740144511000635), and even [improve cognition](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1053810010000681) while reducing distracted thoughts.  
  
Sounds good?  
  
It is! Mindfulness has been conclusively proven many times over to have a positive effect on a person’s happiness. People often complain that they feel life is passing them by, and that they’re too busy to enjoy it. This, along with feeling stressed, scattered and overwhelmed, is an all-too-common experience in today’s fast-paced world. In fact, in 2015 a study showed that here in Ireland more than [82% of the national workforce suffer from feeling stressed](http://www.irishexaminer.com/business/82-of-irish-workers-stressed-351525.html), negatively impacting both their performance at work and their personal lives, something that can drastically affect mental well-being. What’s more, the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) estimates that Irish adults have one of the highest rates of depression in Europe with a reported 12% suffering from depression. These are real threats to well-being that should be avoided and treated at all costs.

The purpose of mindfulness is to plant oneself firmly in the present, take into account your surroundings, and give yourself the time to truly experience what you’re feeling and doing. Consider the state of mind of a young child at play – they are completely absorbed in what they’re doing and show a deep appreciation for whatever scenario they’re imagining. This enthusiasm and pure sense of appreciation for the present is what practitioners of mindfulness strive to achieve – not to regress to childhood, but to once again experience life in a pure way unfiltered by thought or judgement.

As adults we tend to overthink things – we feel too busy with our many responsibilities to just take time off and just “be”. However, practicing mindfulness doesn’t require taking time off from anything – with a little training, you can learn to incorporate this practice into your daily life. Once you’ve learned the techniques to achieving this state, you can practice mindfulness anywhere - on the bus, at school, and while you work. Even taking a few moments to clear your head and centre yourself can make a huge difference in your day, settling your thoughts and removing feelings of stress, unhappiness and anxiety.

While people can sometimes hear the word mindfulness and conjure up images in their mind of impossible yoga postures and strong smelling incense, mindfulness is now being practiced in cultures and organisations worldwide, be they religious, spiritual or secular, and while we are familiar with this type of practice being used by Buddhist monks and Indian gurus, it’s rapidly becoming the norm at corporate retreats for lawyers, education professionals, businesspeople, and anyone who may suffer from stress in the workplace. Mindfulness can be practiced by children, teenagers and adults – it’s never too late to learn simple techniques that can be put into practice that will give you the tools to bring an element of peace, happiness and contentment into every single day.