

MIND FULL OR MINDFUL?



Surinder Arora describes a technique that helps her when the pressure of clinical practice becomes too intense.

Our lives are busy. We live in a world where there's so much to do with so little time. A world where FOMO (fear of missing out) has made it into the dictionary and apples and blackberries are no longer just the names of fruits.

A world where we give more attention to our electronic devices than to someone standing right in front of us.

Our modern society is geared towards the next new thing; a better car, a bigger house, the highest qualification. Subliminal messages in mass advertising dictate that there is a need to look, walk and even talk a certain way. We are constantly bombarded with e-mails, messages and responsibilities as well as exciting and attractive new prospects and opportunities.

A reception area full of patients, endless waiting lists and extra emergency appointments slotted in amongst other things can send us into overdrive. Our overloaded minds need to process and filter through this sea of incoming traffic and extract what is relevant to us as individuals. Subsequently, we spend more time doing rather than being.

ENTER MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is defined as "a state of active, open attention on the present." Business giants including Google, Giant Mills and Goldman Sachs are supporting this type of practice claiming that it improves health, productivity and job satisfaction.

Once upon a time the term "mindfulness" would propose an image of leaving everything behind, going to a cave somewhere and sitting alone for days, months or even years to reach a state where the mind is completely free of any thoughts. This is no longer the case.

WHAT DOES MINDFULNESS REALLY MEAN?

- Awareness
- Being present
- Waking up
- Living in the moment

The NHS states that "reminding yourself to take notice of your thoughts, feelings, body sensations and the world around you is the first step to mindfulness".

More often than not familiarity with a task allows us to switch over to "auto-pilot". Such mundane tasks of washing up, cleaning our own teeth or cleaning someone else's teeth allows our mind to wander.

We think about what is for dinner, whether we'll finish on time today, when the next meeting is scheduled for. With an influx of thoughts delving into the past or future, we find ourselves miles away from the present moment. Living in the past or spending too much time dwelling on the future can lead to anxiety and depression.

WAKE UP!

People can sometimes sleepwalk through life - waiting for the weekend, planning that next holiday and dreaming about things. A few years ago I realised that this was no way to be living. There must be more. How do I maintain happiness and contentment? Is this even possible? After engaging with different groups of people who shared many inspiring ideas, I concluded that the one thing that leads to happiness is being grateful.

To be grateful we need to be in the present moment and being present is practicing mindfulness. It is only when we are present that we truly appreciate and seize the opportunity that the moment brings.

BREATHE

My mindfulness practice is simple. Each morning for two minutes after waking up I sit in silence and simply breathe. I focus on my breath; breathing in and out. I take note of my calmness and state of being. I say thank you for the day ahead and proceed with my routine.

During the day I try to maintain being in the present moment and naturally, a lot of the time, I find I am not. However, when this happens, or if I feel overwhelmed and anxious, I simply return to focusing on my breathing for a short while to help me return to the now. I realise this is a process and like anything, I need to practice to become better.

IT'S ABOUT YOU

Ultimately, engagement in mindfulness or a similar practice is completely personal and voluntary. It took a little while to get into it, but I have witnessed a huge shift in my perspective and enjoyment in life since doing so. This is not to say I don't have days where my alarm goes off and I hit the 'snooze' button or I am irritated by an external event. It does mean however, that I feel more alive, energized and involved in what is going on inside and outside of myself.

JUST BE

In essence, mindfulness is simply remembering to wake up every moment of every day.

THE RESULT

You should expect to see an improvement in health, focus and productivity. With practice you develop more control of who you are with an increasing feeling of empowerment and engagement in every moment of your precious life.



BIOGRAPHY

Surinder Arora BDS, MFDS RCS (Edin) graduated from Sheffield in 2011. In the UK she worked in hospital practice and general dental. Now based in private practice in Singapore, Surinder is involved with the Singapore Dental Association and has a keen interest in public health and wellbeing.

Recommended reading and resources

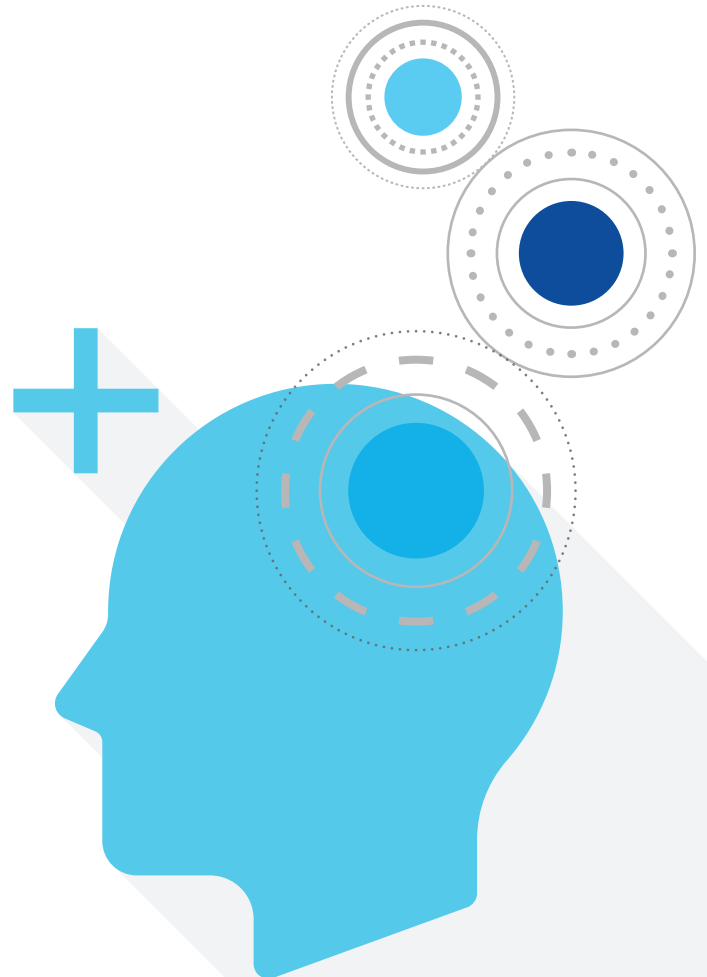
Robin Sharma 1997: *The Monk Who Sold his Ferrari*

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Michael W Taft 2015: *The Mindful Geek*

www.mindful.org

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