

Ageing Well 2021/22 Series plan Talk 8: Mindfulness and Ageing, Dr Susanna Summer (Clinical Psychologist, Summer Psychology Services.)

- Are we prepared to live longer?
- Ageing brain
- Learning languages and digital technologies in older age
- Disenfranchising grief and caring while ageing
- Nutritional needs while ageing
- Pharmacotherapy while ageing
- Mindfulness and ageing
- Move it and breathe
- Standing tall
- The things we don't talk about – Intimacy and ageing

For more information and live streaming links follow:

https://ordo.open.ac.uk/collections/Ageing_Well_Public_Talks_2021-22/5493216

Overview

- What is mindfulness?
- The three minute breathing space
- What is the benefit of it?
- How does it work?
- Summary and Questions

Depending on the format, mindfulness works across physical, social and cognitive stimulation levels:

- Mindful movement
- Attention and memory
- stimulation
- Group delivery

The opportunities of the later stage of life....“Why do we practice mindfulness?.....So you can enjoy your old age.” Shunryu Suzuki Roshi

The best way to learn about mindfulness is to practice

- The three minute breathing space is a brief grounding practice, which was developed to help people anchor themselves in the present moment.
- I will guide you through the practice for the next slide.
- It is completely optional.
- Helpful attitudes to bring to the practice are ones of openness and putting to one side hopes or expectations.
- Any questions?

Acknowledging

- Bring yourself into the present moment by deliberately adopting a dignified posture. Then ask: 'What's going on with me at this moment? What thoughts, feelings and body sensations am I experiencing right now?'
- You could put your inner experience into words, for example, say in your mind, 'A feeling of anger is arising' or 'self-critical thoughts are here' or 'my stomach is clenched and tense.'

Gathering

- Gently bring your full attention to the breathing. Experience fully each in-breath and each out-breath as they follow one after the other. It may help to note at the back of your mind 'breathing in...breathing out', or to count the breaths. Let the breath function as an anchor to bring you into the present and to help you tune into a state of awareness.

Expanding

- Expand your awareness around the breathing to the whole body, and the space it takes up, as if your whole body is breathing. Especially take the breath to any discomfort, tension or resistance you experience, 'breathing in' to the sensations. While breathing out, allow a sense of softening, opening, letting go. You can also say to yourself 'it's ok to feel whatever I'm feeling.' Include a sense of the space around you too. Hold everything in awareness. As best you can, bring this expanded awareness into the next moments of your day.

Thoughts/Reflections?

There has been a huge explosion of interest in mindfulness.....

The evidence base typically applies to these courses

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)

Breathworks

Mindfulness Based Living Course (MBLC)

Mindfulness Based Childbirth and Parenting (MBCP)

Mindfulness Based Relapse Prevention (MBRP)

These programmes are: Informed by a clear rationale; Teacher-led;

Have been developed to be scalable; Have a set curriculum, typically at least eight sessions with 30 – 45 mins daily home practice, incremental development and experiential learning; and have a clear commitment to be evidence-based.

- UK Network for Mindfulness-Based Teacher Training Organisations *setting standards for mindfulness-based teaching*
- UK Network for Mindfulness-Based Teachers Good practice guidelines for teaching mindfulness-based courses
- The Universities of Bangor, Exeter and Oxford Mindfulness-based Interventions Teaching Assessment Criteria (MBI:TAC)

Why be mindful?

“In today’s rush we all think too much– seek too much – want to much – and forget about the joy of just being” Eckhart Tolle

“Mindfulness is simply being aware of what is happening right now without wishing it were different. Enjoying the present without holding on when it changes. (which it will) Being with the unpleasant without fearing it will always be this way. (which it won’t)” James Baraz

- NO! Mindfulness meditation is paying attention in a systemic way to whatever you decide to focus on, which can include awareness of your thoughts.
- By listening to your thoughts, you discover your habitual patterns.
- Your thoughts have a large impact on your emotions and the decisions that you make so paying attention to them is helpful.

- The aim of mindfulness isn't to make you feel more relaxed.
- Trying to relax only causes more tension.
- Mindfulness is accepting your moment by moment experience.
- So, if you are tense, mindfulness is being aware of that tension - Where do you feel tense? What's its shape, colour, texture?
- What's your reaction to this tension, your thoughts?

How does mindfulness help us to age well?

- Mindfulness can reduce chronic pain and the emotional reaction to it. Recent research suggests that pain 'unpleasantness' levels can be reduced.
- Clinical trials suggest that mindfulness improves mood and quality of life in chronic conditions such as fibromyalgia and lower back pain, in chronic functional disorders such as IBS, and in challenging medical illnesses, including multiple sclerosis and cancer.
- Mindfulness enhances mental and physical stamina and resilience.
- Meditation and mindfulness can improve control of blood sugar in type II diabetes.
- Meditation can improve heart and circulatory health by reducing blood pressure and lowering the risk of hypertension. Mindfulness can reduce the risks of developing and dying from cardiovascular disease and lowers its severity should it arise.

How does mindfulness help us to age well?

- Mindfulness can improve clinical-level depression. Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) is one of the preferred treatments recommended by the UK's National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence.
- Mindfulness can reduce addictive and self-destructive behaviour. These include the abuse of illegal and prescription drugs and excessive alcohol intake.
- Meditation can enhance brain function and increase grey matter in areas associated with self-awareness, empathy, self-control and attention.
- Mindfulness may reduce ageing at the cellular level by promoting chromosomal health and resilience.

Mindfulness as a preventative intervention

- Mindfulness has been demonstrated to enhance many forms of cognition that are known to decline with age such as working memory along with many forms of attention.
- Researchers have proposed that given mindfulness' ability to strengthen attention, there is good justification for developing mindfulness groups to halt the deterioration from mild cognitive impairment to dementia (Robertson, 2015)
- It reduces some of the thinning of certain areas of the brain that naturally occurs with ageing, and increases hippocampal volume.
- Meditation improves the immune system. Regular meditators are admitted to hospital far less often for cancer, heart disease and numerous infectious diseases.

Mindfulness for carers

- Dementia care giving presents serious cognitive, emotional, relational, and role challenges to family caregivers (e.g., Savla, Roberto, Blieszner, Cox, & Gwazdauskas, 2011)
- Confers psychological and physical health risks, including higher risks of both psychiatric morbidity and mortality (Capistrant et al., 2012)
- Interventions that contribute to maintaining the mental and physical health of family caregivers can contribute to greater quality of life (Mittelman, 2005).

Does mindfulness work for everyone?

- No intervention is helpful for all people all of the time
- Some people find it difficult or impossible to turn off the self-critic
- People with trauma who are usually emotionally disconnected might find themselves feeling over-whelmed
- It might just not feel helpful for you
- If this is the case for you Don't worry, consider other ways of being more present in your life such as when active/doing something creative

Stress Response

Central Nervous System

Perception - Narrowed Memory -

Coarse, Imprecise Learning - Blocked

Conditioning - Defense

Tendency - Regress or Perseverate

Tone – Fight or Flight

Muscular System

Tension

Ready for Action

Jaws Clench

Body Braces for Action

Autonomic Nervous System

Heart rate increases Blood pressure increases Oxygen need increases Breathing rate increases Palms, face sweat

Blood sugar increases Adrenalin flows

Digestive tract shuts down blood to muscles Blood vessels constrict in hands, face

Is all stress bad?

- Positive- Brief in heart rate, mild elevations in stress hormone levels
- Tolerable – Serious, temporary stress responses, buffered by supportive relationships.
- Toxic – Prolonged activation of stress response systems in the absence of protective relationships

Paul Gilbert's Three Circles Model of Compassion

The Threat-Defence System ensures our survival and is activated when we perceive danger or threat. The aim of the stress response of fight, flight, disgust or freeze is to protect us but, often it is overly activated and we assume or exaggerate the threat contributing to excessive feelings of anxiety, anger, hate, sadness and insecurity. If in doubt we fear, attack, disgust or run away just in case it is not safe! This is also the system that is activating the inner critic, directing us out of fear, anger or disgust.

The Drive System motivates and energizes us to seek, to engage with the world to meet our perceived needs and wants, to fulfil our desires (lust, power, control, greed) and values. It activates our reward centre and propels us into action to seize opportunities, to take on challenges, to achieve, to accomplish. In this state, we experience a sense of pleasure and excitement when obtaining the object of our desires or meet our goals.

The Soothing System leads to feelings of calm, warmth and contentment. It creates experiences of safeness, comfort and ease. We enjoy the affection and a sense of being connected to one another, the feeling of belonging, being accepted, supported, cared for and valued by others. Here, we can rest, being more accepting and non-judging. This system allows us to savour the good times, to be grateful, to observe and to gain a greater perspective. This powerful system can moderate the other two systems of Drive and Defence when they are overly active

Mindfulness for later life

- Six sessions delivered online during the three COVID-19 national lockdowns
- For patients, carers and the general public
- Supports people to develop their own home practice
- Teaches a range of mindfulness practices in a systematic way
- Based on the MBSR programme, with some adaptations for older adults.

Outcomes from the groups

- Marked improvement in compassion for self and others
- For people with clinically significant levels of depression, these typically dropped from the moderate to severe range to the mild range.
- For people without depression the scores either stayed the same or they reported increased awareness of sad mood, but remained in the subclinical range
- For people whose memory difficulties were anxiety or depression related, they showed an improvement in working memory scores
- All participants showed an increase in mindfulness skills and awareness

Feedback from the groups

“I began to open up my own mind and be less scared about everything.”

“... Having been shielding... It’s been relaxing. You know, and I thoroughly enjoyed it and I’m grateful for it”

“I’m beginning to find all kinds of things to be grateful for”

What was it like attending the group online?

“I felt more comfortable being in my own surroundings”

“because of my chronic condition it’s hard for me to stick to stuff and actually go out and do it so I found it really helpful.”

“it’s a strange sort of dichotomy in a way because in one sense we were less together because we were not face-to-face, but on the other hand were in everyone else’s home, so I kind of in a sense felt more connected.”

Budha quote

“ the secret of health for the mind and body is not to mourn for the past, worry about the future, or anticipate troubles, but to live in the present moment wisely and earnestly.”

Where can I access Mindfulness Courses

- British Association for Mindfulness based approaches holds a list of UK registered mindfulness teachers. <https://bamba.org.uk>
- Many courses are now being run online due to COVID restrictions. Look for courses that are based on MBSR or MBCT.
- If you have some cognitive or attention difficulties, look at one of the courses which has shorter practices, such as finding peace in a frantic world
- There are several books with CDs which can help you to establish your home practice. “Full catastrophe living” by Jon Kabat Zinn outlines the MBSR approach. Danny Penman and Mark Williams have written “Finding Peace in a Frantic World.”

Thank you for your attention. You can contact me if you have questions sue@summerpsychologyservices.co.uk

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Next Talk is 'Move it and breathe' on the 18th May 2022 -Summary of related resources to The Ageing Well Public Talk

Podcasts

- [Vseteckova J & King J \(2020\) COVID-19 Interview podcast for The Retirement Café: 'Ageing Well Under Lockdown'](#)
- [Vseteckova J & Broad E \(2020\) Keep Me Walking - researching with people living with dementia and their carers - Podcast – Open University in collaboration with The Parks Trust](#)
- [Vseteckova J \(2020\) Podcast - areas for research with The Open University](#)
- [Broad E & Methley A & Vseteckova J \(2021\) Podcast OU & The Parks Trust & Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust - Spotter sheet and mindful walking.](#)
- [Broad E & Methley A & Vseteckova J \(2021\) Preventing brain decline while ageing](#)

OpenLearn Resources:

- [Vseteckova J \(2020\) Ageing Well Public Talk Series](#)
- [Vseteckova J \(2019\) 5 reasons why exercising outdoors is great for people who have dementia](#)
- [Vseteckova J \(2019\) Depression, mood and exercise](#)
- [Vseteckova J \(2019\) Five Pillars for Ageing Well](#)
- [Vseteckova J \(2020\) Ageing Brain](#)
- [Vseteckova J \(2020\) Ageing Well Public Talks Series II. Plan for 2020 – 2021](#)
- [Vseteckova J \(2020\) Walking the Parks with The OU and The Parks Trust](#)

- [Vseteckova J, Borgstrom E, Whitehouse A, Kent A, Hart A \(2021\) Advance Care Planning \(ACP \) - Discuss, Decide, Document and Share Advance Care Planning \(ACP\)](#)
- [Vseteckova J, Methley A, Lucassen M \(2021\) The benefits of mindfulness and five common myths surrounding it](#)
- [Vseteckova J, Broad E, Andrew V \(2021\) The impact of walking and socialising through 5 Ways Café on people living with dementia and their carers: A volunteer's perspective](#)
- [Vseteckova J, Methley A, Lucassen M \(2021\) The benefits of mindfulness and five common myths surrounding it](#)
- [Methley A, Vseteckova J, Broad E \(2021\) Outdoor Therapy: The Benefits of Walking and Talking](#)
- [Vseteckova J, Methley a, Broad E \(2021\) What happens to our brain as we age and how we can stop the fast decline](#)
- [Methley A & Vseteckova J & Jones K \(2020\) Green & Blue & Outdoor spaces](#)

COVID-19 related

- [Vseteckova J, How to age well, while self-isolating \(2020\)](#)
- [Vseteckova J, \(2020\) SHORT FILM - Ageing Well in Self-Isolation](#)
- [Vseteckova J, \(2020\) ANIMATION - Keeping healthy in Self-Isolation](#)
- [Vseteckova J et al \(2020\) COVID-19 The effects of self-isolation and lack of physical activity on carers](#)
- [Taverner P, Larkin M, Vseteckova J, et al. \(2020\) Supporting adult carers during COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- [Robb M, Penson M, Vseteckova J, et al. \(2020\) Young carers, COVID-19 and physical activity](#)

- [Penson M, Vseteckova J et al. \(2020\) Older Carers, COVID-19 and Physical Activity](#)
- [Vseteckova J & Methley A. \(2020\) Acceptance Commitment Therapy \(ACT\) to help carers in challenging COVID-19 times](#)
- [‘Ageing Well Public Talks’ Series 2021/2022 repository on ORDO Collections](#)
- [‘Ageing Well Public Talks’ Series 2020/2021 repository on ORDO Collections](#)
- [‘Ageing Well Public Talks’ Series 2019/2020 repository on ORDO Collections](#)



- [OpenLearnCreate Course on ‘Ageing Well’ 2019/2020](#)
- [Home exercise no equipment – no problem \(Blog\)](#)



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