

# Being mindful



I am delighted to be starting a regular column with *Pain Matters*. I hope I can offer an interesting perspective for readers living with chronic pain, as well as other readers who may support a loved one, or client, who lives with chronic pain.



The perspective I will offer is that of **mindfulness**. This is a quality of mind and heart that is characterised by awareness – being ‘awake’ to life rather than functioning from habit, as if on auto-pilot. This gives us the chance to live with a sense of choice and initiative rather than feeling a victim of circumstance.

I was first introduced to mindfulness nearly thirty years ago. This was after I’d already lived with chronic pain for a decade after injuring my spine as a teenager. I’ve had several major operations and now have a paralysed bowel and bladder as well as mobility problems. I now try to bring a mindful approach to managing my pain and find it wonderful. In fact, I have a very good quality of life, despite quite severe pain a lot of the time. Gradually, over the years, mindfulness

has pervaded my whole life – how I think and feel, how I breathe, how I move, and how I go about my daily life.

Often the word ‘mindfulness’ is associated with meditation practice – sitting still for 10-40 minutes a day with your eyes closed and engaging in more formal ‘mind training’ exercises such as focusing on breathing as an anchor for the wandering mind. This is a crucial aspect of mindfulness, but it is not the whole story. Mindfulness in the broadest sense is bringing awareness to as much of your life as possible – both within formal meditation as well as all the activities and behaviours of the everyday.

In this and future columns I’ll introduce you to different ways to bring a mindful attitude to your life.

A good place to start is a very simple mindfulness practice called the Three Minute Breathing Space. You can do this as often as you like. Try it for yourself and see the effect.

# “Mindfulness in the broadest sense is bringing awareness to as much of your life as possible”

## THREE-MINUTE BREATHING SPACE MEDITATION

### STEP 1: ARRIVING

Become still wherever you are – either lying, sitting or standing, choose a posture where you’ll be as comfortable as possible, then lightly close your eyes. Bring your awareness to whatever is going on for you right now.

Give the weight of your body up to gravity. Allow your weight to sink into the points of contact between your body and the floor, chair or bed, whether that’s your feet, your buttocks or your back.

What *sensations* do you feel, right now? If you notice any tension or resistance towards painful or unpleasant sensations, gently turn towards them. Accept them as best you can. If you begin to tense around the breath, then let go a little bit with each out-breath. Soften into gravity.

Notice any *thoughts* as they arise and pass away in the mind. See if you can let them come and go without becoming too identified with their content. Look ‘at’ your thoughts, not ‘from’ them. Observe them as if they were clouds in the sky. Relate to them as a flow of mental events.

Notice any *feelings* and *emotions* as they arise. Can you let these come and go without pushing away those that you don’t like, or jumping on to those that you do like? Include everything within your awareness with a kindly perspective.

### STEP 2: GATHERING

Allow your awareness to gather around the experience of the breath deep in the body. Drop your awareness inside the breath and feel the different sensations in the front, back and sides of the torso, inside the torso and on the surface of the torso. Feel all of the different sensations of the breath as it flows into and out of the body. Can you rest within the flow of the breath? Let everything change, moment by moment. Use the breath to anchor your awareness in the present moment and the body.

### STEP 3: EXPANDING

Gently broaden and expand your awareness to include the whole body. Feel the weight and shape of the body as it sits, stands or lies. Feel the breath in the whole body. Imagine you are breathing in and out in all directions: 360-degree breathing. If you have any pain or discomfort, make sure your awareness stays open to include this with a sense of compassion. Soften tension and resistance with each breath.

Now broaden your awareness even further to become aware of sounds both inside and outside of the room. Be aware of other people around you.

Now gently open your eyes and move the body. As you re-engage with the activities of your day, see if you can carry the awareness that you’ve cultivated with you.

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[www.breathworks-mindfulness.org.uk](http://www.breathworks-mindfulness.org.uk)

‘Three-minute Breathing Space meditation’ is an extract from *Mindfulness for Health* published by Piatkus (2013).