Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) for Depression

What is depression and how can MBCT help?

Depression is very common, affecting 20% of adults at some point in their lives. Depression can last for weeks or months, leads to problems with appetite, sleep, and libido, and can significantly impair ability to function in everyday life and work.

Depression can be caused by stressful life events or major losses, and some people appear to be more vulnerable to depression than others, perhaps because of difficulties in their childhood and upbringing and/or because of biological and genetic susceptibility. Even when people have had treatment for depression, it tends to recur periodically in their lives. Psychological research suggests that this is because people who have been depressed in the past are more prone to fall into negative, repetitive patterns of thought and behaviour.

MBCT helps people to become more aware of these unhelpful patterns of ruminative thought and self-defeating behaviour, and to learn to respond to difficult feelings and moods in a different way. Instead of being caught up in these old habitual tendencies, they can learn to become more aware of the early warning signs of depression and to deal with them more effectively. It is useful to attend an MBCT course when you are feeling well (with possible residual symptoms) MBCT can help to prevent the recurrence of depression, and enhance the quality of everyday life.

'I've been keen to do the course for many years...When I asked my GP to refer me this time I was absolutely determined to do the course as I've had 7 episodes of serious depression and severe anxiety. This was a repeating cycle and I felt I couldn't, and didn't want to, keep going through this...'

Course participant, AccEPT Clinic

What does MBCT consist of?

MBCT courses are taught over eight weeks, in sessions lasting 2 ¼ hours, in groups of up to 10-15 people. During the course regular meditation, gentle movement and other practices form key features which help you to have a more present moment focus and develop a particular non-judgmental stance. From this point of awareness you can make choices about ways of responding to your experiences and taking care of yourself. As well as the practices you will learn ways to bring mindfulness and awareness into the everyday activities of life.

This will be supported both by dialogue in the sessions and by practising at home with the help of CDs of meditation practices and written hand-outs. Prior to committing to the course you will be able to meet the teacher individually to hear a little more about what is involved and ask any questions you may have.

Do I need to attend all the classes?

The course is structured so that each session builds on the previous ones. It is therefore beneficial to attend as many weeks as possible; however if you have to miss one your teacher will help you stay involved.

Do I need to practice at home?

Like any new skill, mindfulness is cultivated by consistent practice. Research and clinical experience show that people who commit to regular practice at home generally benefit t the most from MBCT. During the sessions your teacher will discuss with you ways to fi t this in, which can be adapted if you have a very busy schedule of work and/or family responsibilities.

How can I find out more?

Websites:

- www.bemindful.co.uk
- https://www.mindfulness-network.org

Books:

- The Mindful Way Through Depression: Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness by Mark Williams, John Teasdale, Zindel Segal and Jon Kabat-Zinn.
- Full Catastrophe Living: How to Cope with Stress, Pain and Illness Using Mindfulness Meditation by Jon Kabat-Zinn.
- The Mindful Way Workbook by John Teasdale, Mark Williams and Zindel Segal

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