Do you find yourself often caught up in negative thought patterns that impact your mood and relationships, or struggling to focus and get clarity on things? Many studies have highlighted the benefits of developing a mindfulness practice.

**WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?**

A state of awareness

Noticing what's happening in the present moment.

No judgement

In your mind (thoughts and feelings), body and surroundings (sights, sounds, smells and tastes).

A skill you can learn and practise

Rooted in Buddhism but you don’t need to be spiritual to practise it.

**WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?**

Mindfulness doesn't work for everyone, but many people find it beneficial when practised regularly.

**STRESS**

Reduces heart rate and blood pressure

**SLEEP**

Body scan technique especially helpful

**RELATIONSHIPS**

Increases emotional intelligence

**PAIN**

Changes the perception of pain and improves tolerance

**COGNITION**

Improves working memory, planning, decision making, creative thinking and focus

**MOOD**

Benefits shown in depression using MCBT – Mindfulness-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

**ADDICTIONS**

Helps to manage cravings for food, cigarettes, alcohol and other substances

**GENERAL HEALTH**

8 weeks of practice led to a change in the expression of 172 genes that regulate inflammation, circadian rhythms and glucose metabolism

**MINDFULNESS CHANGES YOUR PERCEPTIONS AND FEELINGS:**

Become more self-aware, understand yourself better

Feel calmer and less stressed

Choose how to respond to your thoughts and feelings

Cope better with difficult thoughts

Positively change the way we see ourselves and our lives

Stand back from our thoughts and start to see their patterns

Experience afresh things that you have been taking for granted

Be kinder towards yourself

**HOW TO PRACTISE?**

Pick a regular time

Choose a technique that works for you

Simply observe your thoughts without judgment and let them go

Keep bringing your attention back if your mind starts to wander

An app or guided meditation can be helpful

**SOME TECHNIQUES TO CHOOSE FROM:**

Breathing meditation

Movement (yoga, walking, T’ai chi)

Mindful eating

Body scan technique

Apply mindfulness to an everyday activity

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**Top Tips for Boosting Brain Performance**

1. **Physical Activity**
   - Increases blood flow & healthy metabolism to feed the brain.
   - Helps to regenerate neurons, leading to better memory/learning.
   - May reduce the risk for Alzheimer's disease.

2. **Standing/Walking When Working**
   - Shows the brain with BDNF - performance enhancing growth protein.

3. **Sleep**
   - Vital for memory, learning & neuroplasticity.
   - Chronic insomnia is associated with Dementia.

4. **Relax**
   - Leisure activities e.g., reading fiction, enhances connectivity in the brain.
   - Dancing reduces the risk of Alzheimer's.

5. **Regulating Environments & Creative Activities**
   - Enhance connectivity of the brain at rest, boosting memory, empathy, attention & focus.

6. **Social Connections**
   - Isolation is detrimental to neuron signalling and performance.

**Brain Facts**

- Multitasking is impossible: Error rate goes up 50% if you try to do 2 things at the same time.

- Thoughts:
  - Your brain generates 12,000 - 60,000 thoughts per day. 95% exactly the same as the day before. About 80% are negative.

- Neural plasticity:
  - Neural connections can be forged & refined or weakened & severed. Even into old age we can learn new skills.

**How to Improve Brain Performance**

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**Regular Breathing Exercises**
- Help faster thinking under stress & long-term decision-making & focus.

**Address Stress**
- Chronic stress linked to increased risk of brain disorders.

**Intermittent Fasting**
- Promotes neuron growth & overall cognitive function.
- Decreases risk of neurodegenerative disease.

**Key Nutrients**
- Omega-3 Fatty acids
  - oily fish - salmon, mackerel, herring, sardines
  - flaxseeds
  - Avocados
  - walnuts

- Leafy greens - kale, spinach, collards, broccoli - may help slow cognitive decline.