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Mindfulness

Patient Information



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What is mindfulness?

Focusing on the daily stresses of your life can mean that you miss how your body really feels. This can be especially true if you are living with a long-term condition such as chronic kidney disease (CKD).

Mindfulness is about paying attention to the present rather than focusing on the past or future. It is about acknowledging your thoughts and feelings and helping you to both understand and enjoy your life more.

We all have busy lives. Our family and friends and work all place demands on our time. Having a condition like CKD can make it harder than ever to slow down and take notice of the world around you. Your mental health is just as important as your physical health and you need to take care of both of these aspects of your life.

This leaflet will introduce you to mindfulness and describes how it can help improve your mental well-being.

Why is mindfulness important?

Mindfulness helps you to reconnect with your body and experience life through all your senses. It is about slowing down and allowing yourself to live in the present instead of worrying about the past or worrying future.





How can mindfulness help me?

Mindfulness can help you to:

- Make more informed choices
- Feel less overwhelmed
- Improve your quality of sleep
- Cope better with stress, anxiety and depression
- Handle difficult situations better

By practicing mindfulness, you can develop a more helpful attitude towards your thoughts and feelings. You can learn to observe them and choose how you respond to them.

Living in the present can give you a better understanding of yourself and improve your enjoyment of the world around you. You can experience things afresh that you may have been taking for granted – the smell of freshly baked bread for example, or the birds singing in the garden.

Mindfulness is not an alternative to medical treatment. You should always follow your healthcare team's advice about medication and discuss any problems that you may be having with them.

What does mindfulness involve?

Mindfulness is about becoming more aware of your thought

processes. We all have issues that we dwell on and find hard to let go.

This is especially the case with long term health conditions like CKD that can dominate your life. Training yourself to step back from your thoughts and focus on what is actually going on around you can have a big impact.

If you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts try to focus on the following:

- How does thinking about this problem make me feel?
- Will thinking about it help me to solve it?
- Am I ignoring other things in my life by thinking too much about this?

The more aware you are of your thoughts and feelings, the more likely you are to notice the early signs of anxiety, stress or depression. If you do start to feel Anxious, stressed or depressed it is important to seek advice from your healthcare team.



How can I become more mindful?

Mindfulness cannot be developed overnight. You may have spent years focusing on negative thoughts and feelings so it will take time to change how you respond to them. The following tips may help you in this journey.

Notice the small things

If you go through life on 'auto-pilot' you're more likely to get hooked on familiar stories about yourself and the world – that this is how it always is and so will always be. This can be unhelpful, especially if those stories are negative. One way to step out of auto-pilot is to stop what you are doing and take a few minutes to explore the world through your 5 senses. What can you see/hear/smell/taste/touch right at this very moment? Notice what this feels like. How does that make you feel?

Name your thoughts

Giving your thoughts and feelings a name may help you to become more aware of them. For example 'I am anxious about my next hospital appointment' or 'I am worried about how my condition may affect my job'

Regular practice

Practicing mindfulness is a bit like doing a weight lifting exercise for the brain. Each time you practice, you are strengthening the mental 'muscle' which can give you a greater focus and awareness. Having a regular time slot to practice may help. First thing in the morning may be a good time for you or while on your lunch break at work. Experiment with different times and places but try to keep it regular in order to develop the habit.



Break the routine

When we do the same things every day we stop noticing them. Try to do something a little differently – go somewhere different for lunch, take an alternative route to work – and see what new things you start to notice about the world.

Stick with it

Don't be discouraged if your negative thoughts and feelings seem to come flooding back in as soon as you stop concentrating on other things. Mindfulness isn't about making them go away but rather about seeing them in a different way. Try to imagine them as buses that you can choose to get on or let them go past you. It is up to you how much they affect your life.

What else can I do to become more mindful?

It will take time to develop a habit of mindfulness. The tips above can be done in your own time but you may like to try a more structured approach and join a meditation, yoga or tai-chi class. These practices can help you become more mindful by focusing on your breathing and relaxing different parts of your body. Contact your local leisure or community centre to see what classes are available. Online courses are also available – see below for details.

Where can I find out more information?

- NHS Choices: Mindfulness
www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness
- NHS Choices: A Guide to Tai Chi
www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/guide-to-tai-chi
- NHS Choices: A Guide to Yoga
www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/guide-to-yoga
- Be Mindful: www.bemindfulonline.com - online course on mindfulness
- Patient View: www.patientview.org – online access to your health records. Ask your renal unit for details about how to join
- Your renal unit may have a **dedicated psychologist** that you can speak to. Ask your kidney doctor or GP to refer you for specialist support



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