



# happier@work

## briefing note 2: mindfulness

*“Mindfulness will not eliminate life’s pressures, but it can help us respond to them in a calmer manner that benefits our heart, head, and body. It helps us recognise and step away from habitual, often unconscious, emotional and physiological reactions to everyday events. It provides us with a scientifically-researched approach to cultivating clarity, insight, and understanding. Practising mindfulness allows us to be fully present in our life and work, and improve our quality of life.”* <http://www.mindfulnet.org>

### What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a simple but profound practice of attention and awareness that is a combination of meditation techniques deriving from ancient contemplative traditions and aspects of modern psychotherapy. By paying mindful attention to sensations in the body, and to thoughts and feelings as they arise, it is possible to develop a day-to-day awareness that is balanced and centred, even if the circumstances of life may be difficult.

### What are the benefits of mindful meditation?

Research studies show that:

- Regular meditation reduces the impact of negative thinking on well-being and behaviour
- Regular meditators are happier and more content than average<sup>1</sup>, which has medical significance, as positive emotions are linked to longer and healthier lives<sup>2</sup>
- Anxiety, depression and irritability all decrease with regular practice<sup>3</sup>
- Memory improves, reaction times are faster, and mental and physical stamina increase through regular meditation practice<sup>4</sup>
- Regular meditators enjoy better and more fulfilling relationships<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ivanowski, B. & Malhi, G.S. (2007)

<sup>2</sup> Frederickson, B. L. & Joiner, T. (2002)

<sup>3</sup> Baer, R.A., Smith, G.T., Hopkins, J., Kreitemeyer, J. & Toney, L. (2006)

<sup>4</sup> Jha, A., et al. (2007)

<sup>5</sup> Hick, S.F., Segal, Z.V. & Bien, T. (2008)

- Meditation reduces the key indicators of chronic stress, including hypertension<sup>6</sup>
- Meditation is effective in reducing the impact of serious conditions such as chronic pain<sup>7</sup> and can help relieve drug and alcohol dependence<sup>8</sup>
- Meditation bolsters the immune system and helps fight off colds and flu<sup>9</sup>

Mindfulness courses teach participants how to practise mindfulness through simple meditation practices combined with elements of contemporary psychology. Courses are taught in a non-religious and non-spiritual context and are not linked to any particular belief or spiritual tradition.

Similar courses have been extensively developed and researched over the past 30 years and have been found to offer a way of improving mental well-being by spending more time living in the present, rather than being obsessively tangled in regrets about the past or worries about future.

Mindfulness skills have been taught in a wide range of health, education and business settings and have helped individuals, teams and organisations improve their focus, concentration, relationships and effectiveness.

## **What does a mindfulness course involve?**

The course is designed to help participants develop their own mindfulness practice. Each course consists of eight two-hour sessions over 8 consecutive weeks. Participants learn the skill of mindfulness using experiential exercises and gentle movement practices alongside a variety of mindful meditations. This is supported through teaching, reflection and group discussion.

Participants are encouraged to develop their own daily mindfulness practice and will be given a practice to do at home 6 out of 7 days, for approximately 45 minutes per day. They will be provided with audio CDs and class materials.

In joining the course each participant makes a commitment, as best they can, to attend all sessions and do the daily home practice. Making time for this can feel uncomfortable at times, but participants are encouraged to work with these challenges as they are an important part of each person's journey.

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<sup>6</sup> Low, C.A., Stanton, A.L.& Bower, J.E. (2008)

<sup>7</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J., Lipworth, L., Burncy, R. & Sellers, W. (1986)

<sup>8</sup> Bowen, S., et al. (2006)

<sup>9</sup> Davidson, R.J., Kabat-Zinn, J., Schumacher, J., Rosenkranz, M. et al (2003)

## The course leaders

The course leaders are all qualified mindfulness practitioners who meet the good practice guidelines set by the UK network for mindfulness-based teachers. They each have extensive teaching experience and a well-developed personal practice.

## Course details

King's Health Partners **happier@work** programme will be running four free mindfulness courses beginning in October 2013. The courses are open to all King's Health Partners staff and will take place at different venues across King's Health Partners at different times of the day. Each course group will be made up of approximately 16 people who will meet weekly for 2 hours, for eight consecutive weeks. There will also be an (optional) Saturday full-day practice session costing £20.

## Who is the course for?

The courses are open to all King's Health Partners staff. It is hoped that participants on this course will be able to learn a practice that will help them look after their own health and well-being. Participants must be over 18 years of age and fluent in spoken and written English (all the instructions and materials provided will be in English).

## How to take part

In order to accommodate as many staff as possible, please email your name, course preference (see separate table) and contact details to **carolyn.swan@slam.nhs.uk** by **30 August** for the October courses and **15 November** for the January courses.

Once your booking has been received, you will be sent a brief application form and your course leader will contact you directly to have a short discussion about the session requirements and answer any questions you may have.

If you'd like to find out more about mindfulness, here are some useful references:

**[www.mindfulnet.org](http://www.mindfulnet.org)**

**[www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/podcasts/what-is-mindfulness](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/podcasts/what-is-mindfulness)**

If you'd like to keep up-to-date with **happier@work** developments, please register your interest by emailing your contact details to **[carolyn.swan@slam.nhs.uk](mailto:carolyn.swan@slam.nhs.uk)**

If you'd like to discuss the **happier@work** project, please contact **[tony.coggins@slam.nhs.uk](mailto:tony.coggins@slam.nhs.uk)**

## Why **happier@work?**

There is compelling body of international evidence that links our happiness with longer lives, better mental and physical health, stronger relationships and a range of other psychological, social and economic benefits. While it is slowly finding its way into public policy, another growing body of evidence is showing that people who experience more positive emotions at work demonstrate better performance, less absenteeism and more positive relationships with colleagues.

In the US, Professor Barbara Frederickson's research into high-performing business teams has gained international attention because of the powerful links it has discovered between high levels of positive emotions and more creative problem-solving, improved performance, better team communication and greater resilience in times of adversity.

In addition, research is showing that people who are more satisfied with work are more likely to help others – and their organisation – outside their regular job roles.

### **Workplace Well-being: The Bad News...**

Work-related stress, anxiety and depression are the most frequent cause of days off work - 9.8 million days lost in UK in 2009/10 (Health and Safety Executive, 2010)

- UK businesses lose £1035 a year for

### **...and the Good News**

There's a lot we can do. According to the Department of Health (2011):

- Early detection and treatment of depression at work saves £5 for each £1 spent
- Mental health promotion at work saves £10 for each £1 spent after 1 year