



## MINDFULNESS TODAY

HEALTH & WELLBEING MINDFULNESS

*free your*  
**MIND**

*... the rest  
will follow*

By Angela McManus

**N**ELUM Jayakody is proud to say she's the perfect example of how mindfulness can help not just your head, but your very wellbeing.

She runs Glasgow Mindfulness Centre and every day teaches the stress management techniques that help students swap their hectic lives for a calmer existence. Today, the Sri Lankan, who has now made Scotland her home, is bright and engaging with a soothing tone that is instantly relaxing. But as she explains, it wasn't always this way.

The former banker turned international development worker was leading a busy, stressful life and was knocked for six when she was diagnosed with fibromyalgia. A condition for which there is no cure, it causes pain all over the body.

A friend who teaches yoga suggested a

**Make 2020 the year you learn how to leave your stresses behind ... and the Glasgow Mindfulness Centre can help**

10-day mindfulness retreat but Nelum was far from being in the right frame of mind to attend. It was two years before she felt able to actually go. "For three days it was very difficult but day by day it got better. We had no books, no television, no phones. It was just you and your breath," she remembers. "I was allowed to be with myself and understand, I gradually let go of the things I had bottled up. Little by little you love

yourself, you accept yourself and you let go of the things you cannot control.

"When I drove back to Glasgow, I realised my pain had gone. And for the last 11 years I've been free of it. I'm a living example of how mindfulness can help you."

A 10-day retreat might seem an extreme commitment for many of us looking for a way to deal with ever-increasing stress and anxiety in our lives. If you've heard of mindfulness and want to know more, try a simple one-off taster session or make time for an eight-week mindfulness-based, stress-reduction course.

Mindfulness is a term most of us are aware of but there are still a lot of misconceptions. Nelum is quick to point out mindfulness isn't sitting cross-legged for half an hour every day. Meditation is one technique, but mindfulness is much more: it's about being in the here and now.

"Most of the time our mind is in the past

or the future. It's very rare that we pay attention to our breath," explains Nelum. "So mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, without judgement."

That sounds simple enough ... but it can be hard to focus when thoughts are replaying conversations and events that have happened or pre-empting what's still to come. It is said we have an average of 79,000 thoughts a day – how can we make space for new ideas when we're recycling all this old stuff? It takes a little application.

"As long as you are breathing you have time to be mindful. In yoga, you control breath but that's a different technique. In mindfulness you observe your natural breath," says Nelum. "Once you pay attention to your breath, are aware of your thoughts and accept how you're feeling right now, whatever the situation you are going through, it's letting go. You are

accepting; this is the truth for me. It helps you to understand who you are."

Nelum trained at the highly regarded Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice at Bangor University, and teaches US clinician Jon Kabat-Zinn's mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR).

**'My pain had gone. I'm a living example of how mindfulness can help you'**

The eight-week course she leads in Glasgow, made up of a two-hour class once a week and daily practice at home, teaches how to let go of negative thought patterns, stay in touch with the present moment and ultimately develop helpful responses to

anxiety-inducing situations. I myself have become a convert after taking the course some time ago when struggling with work-based stress.

In a small group of four, led by Nelum, we met every Monday evening. As well as learning meditation and coping mechanisms, we shared our experiences. The aim was to become more aware, more often, and as the weeks went by we worked together to learn how to deal with our thoughts.

It was hard at first. We're British, we don't talk about how we feel and at times there were moments that almost seemed as anxiety-inducing as the ones that brought us together in the first place. But encouraged by Nelum, we moved forward and as each session passed we learned some of the essential techniques.

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