

MINDFULNESS IN IAPT

NICE Recommendations

NICE recommends mindfulness as a first-line treatment for less severe depression. (1) Mindfulness, taught as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) has long been recommended by NICE as a treatment for relapse prevention for those with recurrent depression (2) and this has been backed up by many studies, summarised in this 2016 meta-analysis (3). It is now also recommended as a first-line treatment, before SSRIs and counselling (4).

Who might benefit?

- Anyone presenting with less severe depression (please read note (6))
- Anyone who is not presently depressed to help prevent relapse
- Anyone who does not want to take medication

What is Involved?

- Mindfulness involves paying attention to what is going on both inside and outside ourselves, moment by moment. Noticing how we can get caught up in our thoughts without stopping to think how those thoughts are driving our emotions and behaviour.
- An important part of mindfulness is reconnecting with our bodies and the sensations they experience. We do this by paying attention to the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of the present moment.
- Another important part of mindfulness is an awareness of our thoughts and feelings as they happen moment to moment.
- Becoming more aware of the present moment can help us enjoy the world around us more and understand ourselves better.
- When we become more aware of the present moment, we begin to experience afresh things that we have been taking for granted.
- Mindfulness also allows us to become more aware of the stream of thoughts and feelings that we experience, and how we can become entangled in that stream in ways that are not helpful.
- This lets us stand back from our thoughts and start to see their patterns. Gradually, we can train ourselves to notice when our thoughts are taking over and realise that thoughts are simply "mental events" that do not have to control us. This can help us deal with issues more productively.
- Awareness of this kind may also help us notice signs of [stress](#) or [anxiety](#) earlier and deal with them better.

What Happens?

- Mostly taught in a group led by a facilitator who is qualified to teach mindfulness and has undergone rigorous training. They also practise mindfulness themselves. This enables them to have an understanding of the ways in which mindfulness works at an experiential level.
- A course lasts about 8 weeks. It is this long as it gives time for changes in the way in which we relate to things to start to take effect.
- Each weekly session is about 2 hours long. During a session, participants will practise together, explore what happened and also look at ways in which mindfulness can be used in everyday life.
- There is also mindfulness practice to do at home. This is the largest part of a course and there needs to be a degree of commitment to doing this home practice in order for participants to get the most out of a course.

Is it for Everyone?

Studies show that mindfulness can help with stress, anxiety and depression. More research is needed to show whether it helps with other mental health conditions.

Many people find mindfulness helpful, but it's not right for everyone. Some people find that it does not help them, or that it can make them feel worse. Please see the notes at the Oxford Mindfulness Foundation for a more detailed explanation of contra-indications (6).

Notes

(1) Less severe depression encompasses subthreshold and mild depression, and more severe depression encompasses moderate and severe depression. Thresholds on validated scales were used in this guideline as an indicator of severity. For example, a score 16 on the PHQ-9 scale was used, with scores less than 16 defined as less severe depression, and scores of 16 or more defined as more severe depression. (Depression in adults: treatment and management NICE guideline [NG222] Published: 29 June 2022)

(2) Depression in adults: recognition and management. Clinical guideline [CG90] Published: 28 October 2009

(3) JAMA Psychiatry. 2016;73(6):565-574. doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2016.0076

(4) Depression in adults: treatment and management NICE guideline [NG222] Published: 29 June 2022

(5) <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/tips-and-support/mindfulness/>

(6) A helpful exploration of the safety of mindfulness can be found here: <https://www.oxfordmindfulness.org/news/is-mindfulness-safe/>