

Mindfulness



Working together for better patient information

What is mindfulness?

Focusing on life's daily stresses can mean 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 understand and enjoy your life more. We all have busy lives. Our family, friends and work all make demands on our time. Having a condition like CKD can make it even harder to slow down and notice 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 describe how it can help improve your mental wellbeing.



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 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 practising 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 taken for granted – the smell of freshly baked bread for example, or birds singing in the garden.

Mindfulness is intended to work alongside 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 when you are living with a long-term health condition, like CKD. Training yourself to step back from your thoughts and focus on what is actually going on around you can have a big impact. It can allow you to respond, rather than merely react to situations.

If you find yourself caught up in your thoughts try asking yourself:

- 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 find yourself having negative thoughts over a long period of time, or have thoughts about hurting yourself, it is important to seek help from a professional such as your GP or kidney team. Some kidney units have psychologists you can talk to. Kidney Care UK also offers a free counselling service for kidney patients and their families.

For more information, go to www.kidneycareuk.org/counselling

You can also contact us at info@kidneycareuk.org or call us on 01420 541 424. Other sources of help can be found at the end of this leaflet.



How can I become more mindful?

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 to break this habit and become more mindful.

Notice the small things

If you go through life on 'auto-pilot' you're more likely to get hooked on familiar ways of thinking about yourself and the world – this is how it always is, and so will always be. This can be unhelpful, especially if those thoughts are negative. One way to step out of auto-pilot mode is to stop what you are doing and take a few minutes to explore the world through your five senses.

- What can you see/hear/smell/taste/touch at this very moment?
- 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 CKD might affect my job.'

Regular practice

Practising mindfulness is a bit like doing a weightlifting exercise for the brain. Each time you practise, you are strengthening the mental 'muscle' which can give you a greater focus and awareness. Start with just a few minutes each day and build up as you become more confident.

Having a regular time slot to practise may help. First thing in the morning or on your lunch break may be good times for you. Experiment with different times and places, but try to keep it regular to develop the habit.

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a denim jacket and dark pants, is walking away from the camera on a dirt path through a lush green forest. The path is surrounded by tall trees and dense foliage, with sunlight filtering through the leaves. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

Try something new

When we do the same things, every day, we stop noticing them. Try making different choices – go somewhere new for lunch or 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 negative thoughts 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 watch go past. It is up to you how much your thoughts affect your life.

What else can I do to become more mindful?

It will take time to develop a habit of mindfulness. The suggestions 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 as you learn to focus on your breathing and relax different parts of your body. Contact your local leisure or community centre to see what classes are available. Online courses are also available – see back page for details.

Where can I find more information?

- Kidney Care UK: Living with kidney disease
www.kidneycareuk.org/about-kidney-health/living-kidney-disease/
- NHS: Mindfulness
www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness
- Kidney Care UK also offer a free counselling service for kidney patients and their families. For more information go to www.kidneycareuk.org/counselling or contact us at info@kidneycareuk.org or call us on **01420 541 424**






Contact us



In partnership with

UK Kidney Association

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