

# MINDFULNESS IN MOTION



Finding peace and stillness in our everyday lives. *By Tamara Russell*

**T**he relentless pace of our Western modern technological lifestyle is at odds with optimum human functioning. The increasing amount of time spent in the virtual world, absorbed by smartphones and tablets, leaves us up ‘in our heads’ and disconnected from the body. This disconnection fuels the rising tide of physical health problems (e.g. musculo-skeletal problems, ‘lifestyle’ diseases). It also impacts negatively on our ability to identify, tolerate and regulate emotions expressed in the body, prompting mental health difficulties and perhaps some of the so-called ‘medically unexplained symptoms’.

Cognitively, information overload compromises our attentional system, making it difficult to pay attention to one thing at a time or for any sustained period. These are the mental and physical consequences of our current lifestyle, and there is a need for solutions to reduce this suffering. Is mindfulness training an ancient antidote to some very modern problems?

Increasing body awareness, developing emotional tolerance and cultivating attentional capacity are all components of mindfulness training. Learning to pay attention to the body is a foundational skill. This process strengthens the attentional system, with the knock-on effect of being better able to focus, shift and monitor

attention in any situation. Using the body as the attentional training object also increases body awareness and allows a more subtle delineation of bodily sensations. This improves the ability to notice if the body is communicating something noteworthy regarding physical pains (or pleasures) or emotional states (negative or positive). In both cases, a deeper connection with the body allows us to notice earlier on when something important might be happening, and make a considered response. Learning to engage with these experiences in a gentle and accepting way is a crucial aspect of mindfulness training that must not be neglected. As we practice relating in a kinder way to our own thoughts and feelings, it becomes possible to relate to others in a more authentically compassionate way.

## Mindfulness training

To get these benefits, mindfulness training is most often conducted in a static position (sitting or lying down), in a quiet setting, for a set period of time, on a regular (ideally daily) basis. However, this way of training can be difficult for those who struggle to find the time, or who find it hard to sit still, or who have very busy minds. For these individuals, mindful movement training might be a better option to get them started in their training and able to access the benefits described. The book, *Mindfulness*

*in Motion*, lays out a five-part training programme that uses the moving body as the main training tool. It explores five key themes including Pause, Intention, Attention, Mental Habits and Compassion through a variety of movement exercises, with links to the underlying neuroscience and psychological theory behind mindfulness training. Using movement as the training object for mindfulness means that any time you are moving you can be training your mind. This could include mindfulness of everyday movements (such as brushing your hair or teeth, walking to the front door, drinking a cup of tea) and/or new movement sequences (such as those taught in yoga or tai chi).

## Attention to movement

When a mindful, gentle, attention is brought to everyday movements, you are training your mind in the ability to move between automatic and what is called ‘controlled’ processing. Well-learned movement sequences are revisited, seen as if for the first time, as they are brought out of automatic mode and consciously examined. In this process, there may be the chance to experiment moving differently, more effectively, or in a way that promotes gentleness and ease rather than striving and agitation. An identical process is required when developing mindfulness of