

A higher state of consciousness

Hypnotherapy is another popular way to relieve stress and mental health issues. It works once the client is in a hypnotic state. This is not, as many imagine, being unconscious or in a trance but is more like a state of extreme concentration, so much so you forget what is going on around you. If you have ever driven a car for a long time and suddenly realise you don't remember the last ten minutes, then you have been in a hypnotic state. It is a kind of losing of self awareness, rather than going into a sleep. Daniel Fryer (right, www.inhypno.co.uk) is a London-based hypnotherapist who works regularly with

clients suffering from anxiety, stress and mental health issues. He says: 'Your unconscious mind is the storehouse for everything you are: your learning and experiences, habits and behaviours, confidence, willpower and more. Your conscious mind is forever checking this storehouse, reminding itself on how to be you on a second-by-second basis. Hypnosis can access the power of your unconscious mind. With it, you can layer in new information, tied into goals you already know you want to achieve. We can boost confidence and willpower, break bad habits and keep



you focused on your goals, whatever they may be. Hypnosis is also a wonderfully relaxing state of mind to be in and a great stress-buster.'

Meditation is medication for the mind

Staying sane: As we approach World Mental Health Day on October 10, **LUCY FRY** investigates ways to look after your mind and cope with the daily pressures of life

Meditation, it seems, is the buzz word of the moment but there was a time when the very mention of it would have people switching on every noisy electrical appliance in the house. Just the idea of it frightened some; all that sitting still and trying to block out all your thoughts to get in touch with your... nothing?

People tend think meditation is something best left to hippy-thinkers, recovering addicts or those with too much time on their hands.

But the launch of meditation website Headspace (www.getsomeheadspace.com) means people can take a fresh approach to mindfulness and mental health.

Its central aim is to make meditation accessible and practical for more people, especially those who might never have thought themselves an appropriate candidate for it.

With this goal in mind, former Buddhist monk Andy Puddicombe and his co-founder Rich Pierson have launched their Take Ten programme online, urging people to spend just ten minutes of their day meditating. What's more, it is completely free. All you need to do is sign up on the Headspace website and Puddicombe will guide you via illustrations and video in your 600 seconds of daily meditation.

And for those wanting something more one on one, he sees private clients too – a bit like a personal trainer for the mind.

People come to him for what he calls 'The Big Five': depression, anxiety, insomnia, anger issues and any kind of obsessive compulsive behaviour. When I ask Puddicombe (pictured above) what meditation is exactly, he simply urges me to try it. 'It is completely experiential,' he explains. 'If I were to tell you about chocolate, you wouldn't then really know the way it tastes. You need and want to put that chocolate inside

your mouth. It is the same with meditation. We very deliberately don't give a definition. The experience is always defined by the person who does it. It is in the practice of meditation, rather than the explanation of it, where the changes happen.' And so, under his tutelage, I take just ten minutes to meditate. I am nervous and self-conscious but Puddicombe talks me through it, asking me to sit up straight with my hands on my knees, relax my body bit by bit and focus on the inhalation and exhalation of my breath.

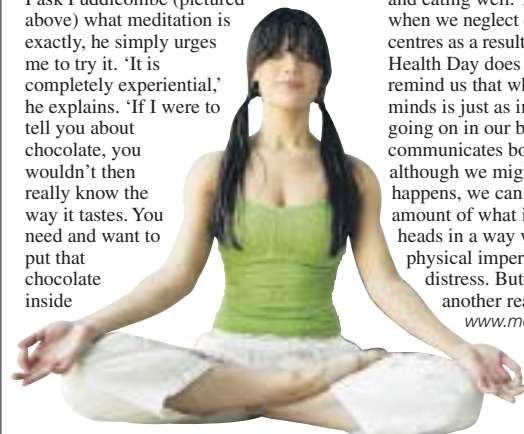
The time passes slowly but there are moments, just fleeting ones, where I actually stop thinking. Or at least, I am not hearing all the thoughts. It is a truly special thing, internal silence, despite the noises coming from the street. It does not

last for more than a few seconds but, like anything, I am a novice and I must practise to get better.

However, what I realise from this is that meditation is not some kind of clichéd loss of awareness but the search for both focus and relaxation simultaneously. The message seems to be that if you can manage both these things at the same

time then you are fully in the moment rather than distracted by the brain's constant chatter. 'Being distracted is not meditative,' says Puddicombe. 'Being aware is meditative. By using the senses in the body, you can work on constantly engaging in the present.'

So clearly, you don't need to devote hours of your day to meditation to make a difference to your mental health. Just ten minutes can make a real difference. Not much is it? Especially in a culture where we spend more and more time, effort and money taking regular exercise and eating well. The problem arises only when we neglect our mind and emotional centres as a result. Surely if World Mental Health Day does nothing else, it should remind us that what is going on in our minds is just as important as what is going on in our bodies. Very often, mind communicates body (and vice versa), although we might not realise it. As it happens, we can actually conceal a large amount of what is going on inside our heads in a way we can't with many physical imperfections or signs of distress. But this should not be another reason to ignore them. www.mentalhealth.org.uk



Health: It's important to take time out from the daily grind

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