

Mindfulness

Sports and Leisure

Many sportsmen and women are using mindfulness as they find it helps with concentration and focus. But you don't have to be good at sport in order to experience the benefits. Giving yourself some time to let off some energy, de-stress and stretch out can be really helpful. Read the example below that illustrates the benefits of mindfulness, as well as providing guidelines for introducing mindfulness into sport, but the principles can be applied to any leisure activity.



"I took up running after reading Danny Dreyer's *Chi Running* and I realised I could use mindfulness to turn running into a meditation practice. In Chi Running, the focus is on the body and its posture, noticing body alignment and making adjustments to prevent injury (which, incidentally, also increases speed). The emphasis is on a gradual process and on starting from where you are now (even if this is not where you would like to be). Although I am a relative beginner – and a slow one at that – I now love running. I love the sense of community I receive from running in London's Hyde Park and seeing the same faces from time to time; the city is no longer anonymous. I feel connected to the city: passing the King's Troop on the way to the Changing of the Guard, tourists scratching their heads as they puzzle over a map, the marathon runners pounding out their training hours. I love feeling the weather on my face and experiencing the seasons changing. I enjoy seeing what my body is capable of and, although I am slow, I work the "edge" of what I can do, and recognise that every "running" day is different from the one before. I have learned the importance of listening to my body to avoid the risk of injuring myself".

TRY THIS: CHOOSE AN ACTIVITY

Paying attention to your experience means paying attention to what is arising in terms of sensations felt, thoughts, and emotions. How are you doing your chosen activity? This could be running, tennis, cycling, swimming, walking, photography, learning to play a musical instrument, painting etc.

Are you giving yourself a hard time because you are not running fast enough or haven't produced a masterpiece of because you dropped a stitch?

What emotions are arising as you do this activity?

What sensations are you feeling in the body?

Be curious about your experience.

When we do any activity mindfully we let go of any attachment to a particular outcome and instead focus on the process. Paradoxically, letting ourselves off the hook in terms of achieving a particular goal often means we are more relaxed and thus able to have a different experience with more favourable results. But more significant, perhaps, is that we will almost certainly have a richer and more fulfilling experience and be more aware of what is going on in our body, which is helpful both in terms of technique and injury prevention.

Make some time for you. switch off. and enjoy it.

Why not experiment? Perhaps do your chosen activity as usual one day and another day do it with mindfulness. Reflect on and record your experiences on both occasions. What can you learn from your observations?