

Relate Cambridge follows in celeb footsteps with tips for bringing mindfulness to your relationship and sex life

Mindfulness is having a well-deserved moment in the media spotlight with celebrities such as Emma Watson, Goldie Hawn and Gwyneth Paltrow swearing by it. The seemingly simple act of paying more attention to the present moment has been shown to improve mental wellbeing and was the theme of this year's Mental Health Awareness Week (11th-17th May). But is it really that easy?

Relate Cambridge believes many people could benefit from introducing basic mindfulness exercises to their relationships and sex life, so has put together some simple exercises to get started.

Relate counsellor Elaine Taylor explains what the fuss is all about: "We use mindfulness in sex therapy to help people experience more pleasure by being able to relax and stay focused and present in the moment. Mindfulness can also benefit our relationships as a whole by relieving stress, building intimacy and enhancing inner peace. This in turn allows us to have more positive interactions with our partners.

"The great thing about mindfulness is that there are plenty of exercises you can practise at home, either on your own or with your partner. It doesn't have to be a huge commitment – even starting with a few minutes each day can help you to feel more connected. Don't worry if you feel self-conscious to start with; it may take some time to get used to but you'll feel the benefits once you get into it."

Relate Cambridge's three mindfulness exercises to enhance your relationship

Focus on your breath

Set some time aside every day to focus on your breathing. It doesn't have to be long to begin with – maybe start with just five minutes a day and work your way up to 20.

A good way to start is on your own with no distractions. Close your eyes, relax and start to become aware of how you're breathing. Breathe in slowly through your nose and exhale through your mouth. Repeat this and gradually become aware of sensations in your body. Recognise and welcome them and then allow those thoughts to drift away to be replaced with other feelings as they arise. *Notice* what you're experiencing and feeling. The aim is to let go: rather than reject intrusive thoughts, just let them drift away.

Practise with your partner

Once you've practised the breathing exercise a few times on your own, why not try this simple exercise with your partner? Sit facing and look into each other's eyes. Breathe slowly in through your nose and exhale through your mouth as before but this time synchronise your breathing. Do this for several minutes – it may feel a little strange at first but stick with it and it can have powerful results, increasing feelings of relaxation and intimacy.

Counting exercise

Find a quiet place and close your eyes. Now, in your mind, slowly count to ten. Focus on each number as you come to it. Visualise it, then let it go. You'll probably find that the first few times your mind wanders; when it does, just go back to number one and start again. Gradually you'll be able to build up to ten without interruptions and feel you've created a calm space in your busy day.

Relate Cambridge offers information, advice and counselling for all stages of your relationships, including counselling for couples and sex therapy. Call us on 01223 357424 or visit www.relatecambridge.org.uk for more information.

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Relate Cambridge – supporting relationships at every stage of your life

Notes to editors:

- Relate champions the importance of strong and healthy relationships as the basis of a thriving society.
- Personal and social relationships are important in our everyday lives and are central to our wellbeing.
- Relationships are under increasing pressure - breakdown costs the UK economy £44 billion each year according to the Relationships Foundation.
- Over a million people every year access information, support and counselling from Relate but its clear many more would benefit from Relate services.
- Relate's services extend beyond relationship counselling to family counselling, counselling for young people, sex therapy and informal courses and workshops and are offered through a network of 2,000 counsellors across the country.
- Relate Cambridge celebrates its 70th birthday this year
- For more information and advice visit: www.relate.org.uk