



# Welcome

Welcome to the 8-week MBCT program. MBCT stands for mindfulness-based cognitive therapy. It is a program specifically designed to help you deal with persistent unwanted mood states.

MBCT has been tested in research and proven effective for depression, as well as for anxiety and a wide range of other problems.

You can use this book in a number of ways: as a member of a professionally guided MBCT class, as part of individual therapy, or as self-help.

We wish you well as you embark on this voyage—to discover how you may best nourish your deepest capacity for wholeness and healing.

If you've ever been deeply unhappy with your life for any length of time, you know how difficult it can be to do anything about it. No matter how hard you may try, things just don't get better—or not for long. You feel stressed out, exhausted with the effort of just keeping going. Life has lost its color, and you don't seem to know how to get it back.

Gradually you may come to believe that there must be something wrong with *you*, that fundamentally you are just not good enough.

This sense of inner emptiness might come from an accumulation of stresses over a long period of time or from one or two traumatic events that unexpectedly dislocate your life. It might even just arise out of the blue without any apparent cause. You might find yourself lost in inconsolable sorrow; feeling profoundly empty; or painfully disappointed with yourself, with other people, or with the world in general.

For anyone who experiences emotional problems that won't go away, the despair and demoralization, the sheer joylessness of depression, is never very far away.

If these feelings escalate, they may become severe enough to be called clinical depression. But the sort of unhappiness we are speaking of here touches all of us from time to time.

For any of us who find ourselves with low mood of any magnitude or duration—whether it's major depression; persistent, nagging unhappiness; or intermittent periods of the blues that feel disruptive or disabling—the despair and demoralization, the sheer joylessness typical of depression, are never very far away.

When things get overwhelming, we may distract ourselves for a while, but questions keep nagging at the back of the mind: “Why can't I pull myself out of this?” “What if it stays this way forever?” “What's wrong with me?”

## Bringing Back Hope

What if, despite what your thoughts may try to tell you, there is nothing wrong with *you* at all?

What if your heroic efforts to prevent your feelings from getting the best of you are actually backfiring?

What if they are the very things that are keeping you stuck in suffering or even making things worse?

This book is written to help you understand how this happens and what you can do about it.

## Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)

In these pages we will guide you, step by step, through the MBCT program.

This research-based 8-week course is designed to give you the skills and understanding that will empower you to free yourself from getting entangled in painful emotions.

### **MBCT Is Effective**

All over the world, research has shown MBCT can halve the risk of future clinical depression in people who have already been depressed several times—its effects seem just as good as antidepressant medications.

Of course, depression often arrives hand in hand with anxiety, irritability, or other unwanted emotions. The good news is that while MBCT was developed and has proven extremely effective for depression, research is now also showing powerful effects of MBCT on persistent anxiety and other destructive emotions.

The heart of MBCT is gentle, systematic training in mindfulness (we'll say more about what mindfulness is later).

This training frees us from the grip of two critical processes that lie at the root of depression and many other emotional problems:

1. the tendency to overthink, ruminate, or worry too much about some things, *coupled with*
2. a tendency to avoid, suppress, or push away other things.

If you have suffered long-term emotional difficulties, you'll have already discovered that worrying or suppressing doesn't really help.

But you may feel powerless to stop it.

Redoubling your efforts to switch off your troubled mind may give temporary relief, but it can also make things worse.

Your attention is still hijacked by whatever is troubling you: it's so difficult to prevent the mind from being dragged back again and again to the very place from which you want to escape.

**What if it were possible to learn wholly new skills that allowed you to cultivate a radically different way of working with your mind?**

Mindfulness training teaches exactly these skills: it gives you back control of your attention so that, moment by moment, you can experience yourself and the world without the harsh self-critical voice of judgment that may so often follow you around.

Daily practice of mindfulness reduces the tendency to brood and worry about everything.

You wake up to the small beauties and pleasures of the world.

You learn to respond wisely and compassionately to the people and events that affect you.

We developed MBCT, and we have seen, over and over again, how it liberates people

**Jessica:** "My problem was always lying awake at night brooding about what had happened at work during the day and worrying about what was going to happen tomorrow. I tried everything to try to stop my thoughts, but nothing worked. It just got worse. Then this [the brooding] started happening during the day as well. I was even forgetting what I was supposed to be doing. That's when I realized things had gone past the point where I could help myself."

**Mindfulness** means being able to bring direct, open-hearted awareness to what you are doing while you are doing it: being able to tune in to what's going on in your mind and body, and in the outside world, moment by moment.

from their burden of low mood and the stress and exhaustion that goes with it. We've seen the extraordinary consequences of their discovery that there is a way to live life more fully than they ever imagined.

*"My son said the other day 'You're in such a good mood these days'—and I felt a smile inside myself, and I gave him a hug."*

*"I started reaching out to friends to get together more often—I'd been afraid to do that—and now my phone rings more often—friends calling with ideas for going out."*

*"Before I came here, I didn't know what it was like to live without pressure. I might have had some idea when I was 5 years old, but I can't remember much of that. I have been shown a different way to live, and it's so simple."*

*"I started painting again for the first time since I was in college."*

*"My daughter says my posture and my walk are entirely different—and I realized she was right . . . I feel lighter somehow."*

## Who Is This Book For?

This book is for anyone who wishes to take the 8-week MBCT program.

This might be as part of a class taught by an instructor, as part of individual therapy, or as a form of self-help, working through the program by yourself or with a friend. Whichever of these routes you take, you will be supported on a daily basis by the guided practices recorded on the CD or audio downloads that come with the book.

And, of course, you don't have to have been seriously depressed to find the MBCT program valuable:

- Research is constantly expanding the range of emotional problems that benefit from MBCT.
- MBCT focuses on the core psychological processes that lie at the root of many different ways in which we can get stuck in unhappiness.

### What If You Are Very Depressed Right Now?

MBCT was originally designed to help people who had previously suffered serious depressions. It was offered to them at a time when they were relatively well, as a way to learn skills to prevent depression from coming back. There is overwhelming evidence that the program is effective in doing that.

There is also growing evidence that MBCT can help people while they are in the midst of a depression.

But if things are really bad right now, and your depression makes it just too difficult to concentrate on some of the practices, then it can be disheartening to struggle with new learning. It might be most skillful to allow yourself to wait a while if you can, or, if you do start, to be very gentle with yourself—remembering that the difficulties you experience are a direct effect of depression and will, sooner or later, ease.

The patterns of mind that keep people trapped in emotional suffering are fundamentally the same patterns of mind that stand between all of us and the flowering of our potential for a more deeply satisfying way of being.

## Why Another Book?

We have already written one book describing MBCT for a wide audience: *The Mindful Way through Depression* (coauthored with our colleague Jon Kabat-Zinn, the principal figure catalyzing and guiding the surge of interest in mindfulness that has swept the world in recent decades).

That book and this workbook complement each other; it is very helpful to use them in tandem.

If you have not read *The Mindful Way through Depression*, you may find it a useful general introduction to the MBCT approach. It gives a lot of background detail that might be particularly helpful if you are using this workbook on your own, as self-help.

If you have already read *The Mindful Way through Depression*, this workbook will give you all the additional tools and detailed practical guidance you need to take yourself through the MBCT program.

### Why a Workbook?

The form of this book is specifically designed to support and guide you through a program that can lead to radical and lasting changes in your life and well-being.

It is rare for such changes to come about just by **reading about** how we get entangled in emotional turmoil and what we can do to free ourselves.

Rather, profound and lasting change usually involves taking some kind of **action**—what, in this book, we call **practice**. It is in this work, done day by day, that 99 percent of the learning in MBCT goes on.

Inner transformation depends on a continuing back-and-forth dance between understanding, practice, and reflection. The new insights and skills that emerge are **embodied** deep in our being—that is why they can have such widespread and enduring effects.

This workbook provides three elements, crucial to this dance of transformation: a STRUCTURE, a chance for REFLECTION, and a source of INSIGHT.

The **structure** means that you have in your hand a map that will guide you day by day along the path of change. The itinerary for each day's journey is spelled out in detail. Once you have made an initial commitment to follow the path, you can simply relax into what is there to be done for that day, for that moment.

Space for short **reflections** is built into the fabric of the book. These give you the chance to pause, to stand back, and to see more clearly what is going on in mind and body and in the world around you. From such reflections insights arise.

The book further supports the development of **insight** by offering, after each practice or exercise, a dialogue reflecting aspects of what other participants discover during the practice. Reading these will help you make sense of what has been happening for you too. In moving in close to your own experience in this way, you begin to make your own discoveries—and gain insight into the possibilities of a greater freedom and well-being.

For many people, the most helpful approach might be to read *The Mindful Way through Depression* (or have it available for reference) along with using this workbook. Many find it most effective to do this in the company of others, working through MBCT in a group with a trained teacher.

## The Shape of the Book

In Chapters 2 and 3 we consider the essential questions: Why do we find ourselves, time after time, sinking into depression or getting stuck in emotional distress? How do the practices and exercises of the 8-week MBCT program make a difference? How might all this help you?

With this understanding in place, Chapter 4 looks at how best to prepare for the course. Then, in the following seven chapters, we move, step by step, week by week, through the nuts and bolts of the program.

Finally, in the concluding chapter of the book we look to the future. We consider how, if you wish, you might further nourish and extend the ways in which mindfulness can transform and enrich your life.

*“Since doing the program I have been able to actually enjoy and be in the present moment . . . realizing this is the only time I have to live . . . so instead of constantly worrying about the future and my past failures, I can more evenly embrace the present moment.*

*“It’s not exaggerating to say that MBCT has changed me in just about every way possible.”*