

The background of the entire page is a dense field of small, five-petaled pink flowers, likely phloxes, with dark centers. The flowers are in various shades of pink, from light to deep magenta. A semi-transparent white rectangular box is centered over the middle of the image, containing the title text.

THE FOUR FOUNDATIONS OF MINDFULNESS

For Fibromyalgia



Welcome to this introduction to

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness for Fibromyalgia

My name is Georgie. I was diagnosed with fibromyalgia in my early twenties and suffered immensely for nearly 20 years. The doctors and specialists I consulted never had any solutions and the medication they offered made my symptoms far worse or weren't effective. I tried to ignore the pain, fatigue, stomach aches and depression and get on with life but I kept having nervous breakdowns and seriously contemplated suicide too many times to count.

Faced with a future reliant on a disability pension because I was unable to work and being pushed to the brink of my sanity by the torture I felt being in my body, I became so desperate to get better that I committed to putting everything I had into healing. Over the following few years I studied fibromyalgia everyday, found the best teachers, doctors and therapists to consult and was willing to try anything and everything to help myself feel fantastic again.

It worked! If I manage my triggers I am symptom free, I have found ways to work that suit my capacity and I am now passionate about spreading the word that it is possible to live a comfortable and wonderful life despite a fibromyalgia diagnosis.

Mindfulness was one of the first tools I used to help with my health and it laid an important foundation for all of the healing that followed.

To get you started, I've created this E-book to introduce you to the concepts, practices and benefits of mindfulness for fibromyalgia.

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INTRODUCTION TO MINDFULNESS



WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness is a state of being that was explored and shared by the Buddha over two thousand years ago. It is one of the core tenets of Buddhist philosophy, which we'll explore further in this E-Book.

Mindfulness based interventions are practices that train participants to live more fully in the moment in order to reduce suffering and the impact of stress and illness. At its most basic, mindfulness can be described as being conscious or aware of something. Mindfulness practices, such as meditation, train us to focus our awareness in the present; observing in a detached manner, without judgment, whilst calmly acknowledging and accepting our thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations. A simple description of Mindfulness by teacher Jon Kabat-Zinn's is:

***'Paying attention in a particular way:
on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally'***

Jon Kabat-Zinn developed a program called Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) which evolved from Buddhism to assist patients with difficult to treat illness.

A core tenet of mindfulness is present moment awareness. In this, we stop spending so much time ruminating on the past or imagining the future and focus our attention on what is unfolding in the here and now.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION?

Mindfulness is a state of awareness that is cultivated through focused practices, including both sitting and movement meditations. It can then be applied to your entire life.

Meditation is way of practicing mindfulness. There are many different styles of meditation coming from different traditions from around the world. They can vary with their aim and intention. The aim of mindfulness meditation is to pay attention in a particular way, in the present moment.

***Meditation is a practice for the art of skilful living. What you
practice in meditation eventually spills over into your day to day life.***

Mindfulness practices primary goal is not to quieten the mind or to relax. Certainly, these are desired results but they are not to be attained by force. If we sit down and intend to stop thinking and be instantly peaceful, we will most likely feel frustration and tension. Rather, the mindfulness practices that The Four Foundations of Mindfulness teach are designed to progressively guide you to pay attention in new ways, while infusing attitudes that cultivate peacefulness.

These foundations guide the practitioner to contemplate the aspects of body, feelings, mind-states and all phenomena that arise during the experience of meditation.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS?

Some of the demonstrated benefits of a regular mindfulness practice include:

- ✦ Reduce anxiety and stress
- ✦ Reduce impacts of pain and illness
- ✦ Reduce feelings of suffering
- ✦ Decrease impacts of depression
- ✦ Improve mental health and mood
- ✦ Increase emotional regulation
- ✦ Increase quality of relationships
- ✦ Improve sleep quality
- ✦ Increase cognitive abilities
- ✦ Increase feelings of calmness, happiness and joy
- ✦ Improve overall wellbeing

In a large-scale review of more than 400 research studies, mindfulness practices were identified as effective for helping almost all people improve their physical and psychological wellbeing. Several studies examining the connection between mindfulness and pain have shown positive results.

Stress in life is inevitable and sometimes it can feel overwhelming. While there are many ways to manage stress, mindfulness is one that carries extra benefits. Mindfulness practices not only addresses current stress, but it can also help us defend against future stress, creating an improved and stable sense of peace.

Mindfulness gives us insight into the way things really are, not what we think they are. This increases discernment and gives us opportunity to respond rather than react to our life circumstances.

“Calm is the peaceful happiness born of meditation; insight is the clear understanding born of the same meditation. Calm leads to insight and insight leads to calm.”

Ajahn Brahm

Mindfulness helps us be less emotionally reactive. The techniques can help you deal with difficult emotions and situations by creating space between your experiences and your responses to them.

Tapping into a state of sensing helps to activate the mode of 'being' as opposed to 'doing'. This can help to interrupt ruminative style thinking as well as the negative emotional habits and physiological responses that may be associated with the doing mode.

HOW DOES MINDFULNESS HELP WITH FIBROMYALGIA?

At its most basic, mindfulness can be described as being conscious or aware of something. As we become more conscious of our experiences and reactions to them, we begin to create a space to change how we deal with the conditions of our lives, including how we react and respond to pain. Mindfulness won't necessarily take your pain away, but you will learn to be more in touch with your body, how it responds to different circumstances and how your thoughts, attitudes and choices can help to manage your symptoms. One study found improvements in some of the symptoms of fibromyalgia, such as less perceived stress, better sleep and an overall reduction in the severity of the symptoms.

Pain

Mindfulness interventions aim to fundamentally alter how symptoms, as well as stressful thoughts and feelings, are experienced so that they are addressed with greater awareness and acceptance rather than with resistance, frustration and suffering.

Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional

Research shows that the chronic pain experienced in fibromyalgia often stimulates negative thought patterns that precipitate pain catastrophising and magnifies the pain experience. Brain scans have shown how the fibromyalgia brain reacts to pain in unusual ways, lighting up regions that normal people don't experience. As a result, we feel pain more intensely and with a variety of accompanying emotions. We're not sure why this is happening but through neuroplasticity (consciously rewiring our brain's programming), it is possible to influence the way our brains react and to help quieten that response. By consciously managing distressing thoughts and feelings that come with pain, we can prevent them from making the pain worse.

This is considered a 'top-down' approach where we use the power of the brain (top) to influence the body (down) via the central nervous system. By consciously inhibiting the run-away pain and stress response in our nervous systems, we can feel better.

The mindfulness facets of observing, acting with awareness and non-judgment are one strategy to moderate the intensity of the pain and associated catastrophic thinking.

Through the mechanism of selective attention; we learn non-avoidance of pain at preliminary stages through increased attention. This paradoxically facilitates pain at the later stages to be more easily disengaged from as we adopt an ongoing, non-judgmental observation of the sensations as well as any thoughts we have about them.

We also begin to see that one's awareness of sensations, thoughts and feelings is different from the sensations, thoughts and feelings themselves. A space is created between our discomfort and how we think and feel about it.

In addition to how we attend to pain, mindfulness may also be able to help promote deep relaxation, which lessens muscle tension that can contribute to pain.

Stress

The symptoms of fibromyalgia are known to be exacerbated by stress and under stressful conditions sensitivity to pain is increased. Chronic stress suppresses immune function and increases inflammation in the body. Both of these mechanisms can be at play in fibromyalgia.

Regular meditation and mindfulness practices have been demonstrated to reduce levels of stress with subsequent decreases in the inflammatory response.

Stress also results in increased muscle tension, reduced efficacy of digestion, increased adrenalin and cortisol as well as increased heart rate and blood pressure. All of these physiological states contribute to poor health outcomes and some have been directly proposed in fibromyalgia hypothesis.

A 2012 study published in the journal *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, suggests that mindfulness meditation may calm the sympathetic nervous system. Sympathetic dominance is a state of nervous system stress that is commonly seen in people with fibromyalgia and can be a contributing factor to all symptoms. Finding ways to rewire the nervous system out of this state and into a relaxed parasympathetic state is vital for healing.

Keeping this in mind, it is important to note that meditating from a state of extreme sympathetic arousal or stress, especially when trauma-related, can be contraindicated and cause harm. A nervous system and mind that is in extreme pain and stress can find the process of inner contemplation too overwhelming. For this reason, it's wise to have a qualified teacher screen for potential issues before beginning a practice and be there to help you if your experience is overwhelming. For some people, trauma healing and nervous system regulating might need to be a priority, prior to commencing a meditation practice.

Sleep

Sleep issues are common in fibromyalgia and in some cases can be a driving factor in the cause and severity of symptoms. Getting enough good quality sleep is essential

for healing and feeling great. Mindfulness can improve sleep quality by reducing stress and anxiety, improving relaxation, slowing breathing, calming the mind and improving pain.

Depression

Multiple studies have demonstrated that mindfulness can significantly reduce the symptoms of depression. Depression is a classic symptom associated with fibromyalgia and there are limited effective treatments available that do not come with intolerable side effects. Learning to manage and improve depression is highly beneficial and yet another reason to commit to a regular mindfulness practice.

Body Awareness.

Mindfulness can be extremely important when you have a condition such as fibromyalgia which can fluctuate hour to hour, day to day, week to week and seasonally.

A regular mindfulness practice offers opportunities to listen deeply to the body.

The result is increased body awareness and insight into the relationship between external factors, behaviours, thoughts, emotions and your physical symptoms. This type of insight can be very empowering as it guides you to take care of yourself in optimal ways to reduce symptoms and improve your quality of life. Having the awareness to perceive subtle early warning signs from your body can guide you to take sensible action and avoid the progression of symptoms into a full flare.

Taking the time to get really curious about the sensations in your body can also provide clarity and detail on what you are experiencing that can be very useful in guiding investigations and treatments for your individual symptoms. For example, when I began meditating I was simply in Pain with a capital 'P', everywhere. The more I got in touch with my body and observed what was going on, the more I was able to see that there was joint pain, shooting nerve pain, muscle pain and spinal pressure. All of these were different and would come and go at different times. Over time, I was able to find the underlying drivers of each of those individual sensations and treat them in different ways. I personally used information that I observed in my meditation practices to guide my healing journey for many years.

Lifestyle behaviours

Increased mindfulness can be highly beneficial in supporting any efforts to create new healthy lifestyle behaviours. Increased body awareness and insight into relationships between environment, behaviour and our internal experiences can help us to see where we might benefit from changing. When we pay attention to the details of our lives we naturally begin to notice what we do that results in suffering, and what we do that results in peace and happiness. The more mindful we are, the more internally motivated we are to choose the paths to peace and happiness.

A great example is developing mindfulness when eating. A regular practice of mindful eating can improve our relationship to food, help to identify food allergies and intolerances, guide optimal food choices, ensure we do not overeat and can contribute to overall heightened sense perception.

Mindfulness can also be supportive in overcoming addictions, setting healthy boundaries and developing good discipline.

HOW DO I DEVELOP A REGULAR MEDITATION PRACTISE?

The benefits of mindfulness have been outlined above but they only work with regular practice. The research is clear that the key to useful outcomes is to keep meditating.

Like any other skill that you aim to learn, meditation requires tutelage and practice.

Many people come to meditation with the expectation that the desired state of mind and the results are to be achieved straight away. Many people claim that they 'tried meditation but they couldn't do it'. This is an unrealistic expectation. You would not expect to sit down to learn to play the piano and claim after only a few lessons that you 'couldn't do it'. Just like learning to play an instrument, learning to meditate and be mindful takes a competent teacher, plenty of practice and ongoing skill development.

The benefits of mindfulness are always most noticeable with regular practice.

In reality, there are almost no barriers to the practice of mindfulness. However, it's quite easy to come up with reasons why we can't or don't practice regularly. No time, too tired, too stressed, too sore. However, with a clear goal and a good plan, small amounts of meditation can be factored into any schedule, even if it's only 5 or 10 minutes a day to begin with.

It can be helpful to adopt an attitude of observing one's life mindfully as an adventure in living rather than one more thing on the to-do list. In addition, we can adopt an attitude of loving self-care and discipline, emphasising the importance of individual responsibility, motivation and effort in order to maintain a regular practice, whether one feels like practicing on a particular day or not.

Any new endeavor is more likely to succeed when we have a community of learning and practice to help cultivate ongoing motivation, support, and feelings of acceptance and belonging.

CORE BUDDHIST CONCEPTS

The different sects of Buddhism have different interpretations of the ancient texts that have evolved over thousands of years. My teachings come from the Thai Forest and Insight Traditions which are of the Theravada lineage of Buddhism. The specific practices I teach are also influenced by Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) which was developed from these lineages by John Kabat-Zinn.

One of the core tenets of the Theravada school of Buddhist philosophy is the cultivation of mindfulness through skillful meditation practices and moral lifestyle choices. The aim is to eliminate suffering and live in joy, peace and happiness, known in the ancient language of Pali as *Nirvana*.

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness come from a teaching called the *Satipatthana Sutta*, a well-known Buddhist text that offers detailed meditation instructions. The foundations are presented in sequence, moving from the densest level of our meditation experience (the body) down to the subtlest (feelings and thoughts). At the deepest levels of this practice, the sense of separation between subject and object ceases. This is a state of deep relaxation, peacefulness and bliss.

In this discourse, the Buddha teaches that The Four Foundations of Mindfulness are the path for overcoming suffering and attaining nirvana, a state of enlightenment.

At its essence, the process invites us to become aware - again and again and again – of the entire field of human experience.

Within Buddhist philosophy and practice, The Four Foundations of Mindfulness do not stand in isolation, but as part of an overarching philosophy known as the Dharma. The following provide a conceptual framework for introducing and explaining Buddhist thought. These concepts require direct experience in order to be personally understood and embodied.

Some key teachings include:

THE UNIVERSAL TRUTHS

In the context of Buddhism, this refers to the three characteristics that are intrinsic to Universal reality.

1. Impermanence: All things constantly change
2. Suffering: Attachment leads to suffering
3. Non-self: All experiences are impersonal

THE FOUR NOBEL TRUTHS

This proposition explains the basic orientation of Buddhism:

1. Suffering exists
2. Desire, craving, clinging and attachment to impermanent states, people and objects is unsatisfactory and results in endless suffering
3. By cultivating non-attachment, we can let go of suffering
4. The Noble Eightfold Path is the path leading to liberation from suffering

The concepts outlined below all guide the practitioner to directly experience these truths.

ANAPANASATI SUTTA

The Breath-Mindfulness discourse provides the Buddha's very detailed instructions on using awareness of the breath as an initial focus for cultivating concentration in meditation. This practice is included in the First Foundation of Mindfulness.

VIPASSANA

Translated, this commonly means *Insight Meditation*. In this context, insight refers to a state of awareness that sees things as they really are (the more literal translation of vipassana is 'super-seeing'). This insight is also referred to as '*wisdom*', meaning the intelligence or understanding of the true nature of phenomena. It is a state of higher consciousness.

Vipassana incorporates The Four Foundations of Mindfulness into its process.

THE SIX SENSE MEDIA

In Buddhism, the six sense fields serve as the bases for the production of consciousness. There are six *internal* sense bases (also known as organs) and six *external* sense bases. Together, there are six internal-external (organ-object) pairs of sense bases:

1. Eye and visible objects
2. Ear and sound
3. Nose and odor
4. Tongue and taste
5. Body and touch
6. Mind and mental objects

The Buddha identified that craving, desire and lust can arise from the sensations we feel when we have contact with the six sense bases. For example, we may crave the taste of a delicious food that is very pleasant to eat. The yummy food is not the

problem, but the way we may become attached to having it all of the time and to be annoyed when we cannot have it creates suffering. To overcome craving and its resultant suffering, one should develop insight into the sense bases by meditating on them in order to understand how the experience, the feelings and the clinging arises and passes for each sense base and its object.

THE FIVE AGGREGATES

The Five Aggregates are aspects of an individual's experience of the world. It is through these experiences that attachment, clinging and craving arise.

In the Theravada tradition, suffering arises when one identifies with or clings to these experiences. This suffering is interrupted by letting go of attachments to them. The aggregates are impermanent and do not contribute substance to the essential sense of self, yet we easily become attached to them and identify with them as "I", "my" and "mine". The insight that the aggregates are impermanent and not-self, aids in letting go of grasping. The five aggregates are:

1. Form (material, body, impression of a person, being or object)
2. Sensations (feelings, pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, received from form)
3. Perceptions (sensory and mental process that registers, recognises and labels)
4. Mental activity or formations (mental imprints and conditioning triggered by an object. Includes any process that makes a person initiate action or act.)
5. Consciousness (awareness of an object and discrimination of its components and aspects)

Through our practice, we learn not to grasp at the forms, sounds, odours, flavours, objects, and mental properties which we perceive. We learn to notice them and let them go.

THE FIVE HINDRANCES

The Five Hindrances are factors that are considered obstacles to the progress of meditation practice and mindfulness. They impact our ability to hold focused concentration. The five hindrances are:

1. Sensory desire:
Seeking for pleasure through the five senses
2. Ill-will:
Feelings of hostility, resentment, hatred and bitterness.
3. Dullness and drowsiness:
Half-hearted action with little or no effort or concentration.
4. Restlessness and worry:
The inability to calm the mind and focus one's energy.
5. Doubt:
Lack of conviction or trust in one's abilities.

A regular meditation practice reveals the presence and absence of these states and with attention, we can learn how they arise, cease and are prevented from arising.

THE SEVEN FACTORS OF AWAKENING

The Seven Factors of Awakening are wholesome qualities that the Buddha claimed were conducive to good practice and essential to master on the path to nirvana, or awakening. They are:

1. Mindfulness (to maintain awareness of reality)
2. Investigation of the nature of reality
3. Energy (determination, effort)
4. Joy or rapture
5. Relaxation or tranquillity (of both body and mind)
6. Concentration (a calm, one-pointed state of mind)
7. Equanimity (to accept reality as it is without craving or aversion)

These qualities can be contemplated or cultivated to counterbalance the Five Hindrances when they are encountered. For example, when one's mind is drowsy, you can develop the factors of investigation, energy and joy; and, when one's mind is restless, you can develop the factors of tranquillity, concentration and equanimity.

THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

In Buddhist philosophy, the Eightfold Path offers us moral guidance in living to help reduce suffering. It involves skillful restraint of our automatic responses through the cultivation of discipline and wholesome states, and through practicing meditation and mindfulness. Living skillfully through the first 7 practices will help to create an ideal environment for practice 8): concentration meditation.

The Eightfold Path consists of eight practices:

- 1) Right view
- 2) Right resolve
- 3) Right speech
- 4) Right conduct
- 5) Right livelihood
- 6) Right effort
- 7) Right mindfulness

in order to support the practice of:

- 8) Right state of concentration meditation

IN SUMMARY

The Dharma philosophy contains many teachings from the Buddha on how to understand the nature of suffering. They provide tools for the relief from suffering and for the cultivation of higher wisdom and nirvana. These center around, and support, a developed state of mindfulness. The intended outcome is to live skillfully so that we are liberated from stress and suffering and feel more peaceful, happy, relaxed and joyful.

At the beginner's stage, it's not important to know all of these concepts. However, knowing that there is a very detailed map of why humans suffer and guidance for how to reduce that suffering can be useful. Understanding the very basic ideas and intentions can be useful in appreciating why the practice of meditation and mindfulness can have such life benefiting results.

Any comprehensive study of this philosophy requires a knowledgeable teacher to bring these ideas and tools to your practice. Endeavours to practice without skilled guidance can be extra challenging so set yourself up for success by learning to meditate with a trained teacher.

Monks and devotees dedicate their entire lives to these ideas and practices in order to receive the maximum benefit. But even a basic regular practice alongside some quality guidance can have remarkable results in our lives.

ATTITUDES TO INFUSE OUR PRACTICE

Essential to effective states of mindfulness is the cultivation of attitudes and qualities that help us with our practice and daily life. Without these qualities we would likely struggle when dealing with the reactions of the mind and body to our experiences. These beneficial attitudes help to calm the mind and body and so we are invited to learn how to cultivate, develop and strengthen them.

'META' - *LOVING KINDNESS*

Loving kindness is an attitude of kindness, compassion, empathy and love towards ourselves and others. For many people, it can be challenging to feel this way and so there is a specific loving kindness meditation practice that supports us in cultivating these qualities.

Building on a foundation of breath awareness and a calm mind, the practitioner starts by wishing themselves happiness, peace and freedom from suffering. The feelings are then extended to someone we have affection for, then someone we may harbor resentment or ill will towards and then out to a group, community or the whole planet.

Practicing this technique helps to cultivate self-compassion, self-acceptance, empathy and goodwill. These qualities are an important element for every mindfulness practice.

BEGINNER'S MIND

Approaching every meditation practice with a beginner's mind can help to remove any expectations that inevitably lead to disappointment. When adopting a beginner's mind, we don't compare to past experience, don't attach any beliefs to how our practice will unfold and we set no expectations of how we should perform or what the outcome should be. We show up each time with the intention to practice without any pressure.

CURIOSITY

Cultivating and maintaining a state of open curiosity is a cornerstone of mindfulness and we approach all of our practices with this attitude. Over time, our curiosity becomes refined and we are able to notice increased detail about our experience. The layers of subtlety reveal themselves as we observe and learn more about ourselves.

This can be particularly useful when dealing with an array of fibromyalgia symptoms. We may come to discover new details in the pain sensations we feel or we may gain new insights into the relationships between behaviour, body, mind and emotions.

NON-JUDGEMENT (ALSO KNOWN AS EQUANIMITY)

This quality guides us to remain neutral in our assessment and interpretation of our experiences. Things are not good or bad, they just are. Things are not right or wrong, they just are. Things are not pleasant or unpleasant, they just are.

If we are busy judging the present based on how we believe it should be rather than noticing it for what and how it is, being fully in the present moment is practically impossible.

This quality is of particular importance when observing our mindfulness practice. We will regularly catch our attention having wondered from the intended point of focus. For example, our minds will go off in thought instead of watching the breath and when we notice this, it can be easy at first, to overtly or subtly criticise ourselves for doing it 'wrong'.

When we infuse our practice with equanimity, we just notice and return to the breath without any judgement.

This is also very useful when dealing with body pain during our practice. Of course, none of us enjoy physical pain, and when living with fibromyalgia the pain is often intense and relentless. It is natural when our practice of focus gets interrupted by pain to feel annoyed, to have a negative emotional reaction and to judge our experience as bad. We naturally have an aversion to pain and want it to go away. From this, resentment, frustration and despair can follow. The point is not to ignore the pain or pretend it doesn't exist, but rather to notice 'I feel pain' and not load it with negative attitudes.

With practice, the cultivation of non-judgement can immensely help us to see our pain as physical sensations and to provide a separation between the feeling and the mind's response.

When combined with curiosity, this can be a highly useful way to transform your relationship to painful sensations.

NON-ATTACHMENT & LETTING GO

This quality invites us to provide a separation between our experience and how we think and feel about it. This includes the experience of physical sensations, emotions and mental concepts, labels, desires and beliefs.

John Kabat-Zinn considers 'letting go' to be synonymous with 'letting be'. This 'letting be' is holding ourselves in the still place of acceptance, from which we can view our

experiences. It is engaging with the flow of life in the now moment, without grasping or clinging. This becomes a way of being in the world, not merely an action that we must do from time to time.

“We humans become trapped in a similar way when we refuse to let go. We cannot move on to what may be a better situation or a new way of thinking because we stubbornly hold onto the old. We get caught by our own desire, by our own attachment to things being a certain way.”

Jon Kabat-Zinn

Non-attachment and letting go does not mean we stop caring or working towards goals. In letting go and letting be we are either in mindful action or mindful rest. Both states call for our participation and commitment to quality of presence.

During our meditation practice we will increasingly be able to notice our ideas, desires, beliefs, agendas, world view and fixations on how the world ought to be. We will also become more intimately acquainted with our emotions, particularly those that tend to stick around for a while. As you become aware of these you can begin to try and let them go. When noticing annoyance, frustration, boredom or anger, we can consciously choose non-attachment and let the feelings pass by.

We notice, we let go, we return to the point of focus in the here and now

As you will discover, this is often not easy so start by practicing with minor concerns before moving onto major worries or negative thoughts. Significant issues related to major life events, trauma or health issues will likely require a more in depth and holistic approach to deal with.

It is equally useful to practice letting go of pleasant feelings. The more we attach to pleasant feelings, the more craving is generated and the more suffering we will endure. So the more you're able to detach yourself from a specific memory of a past state or from a particular set of expectations, the more you'll be able to live completely and appreciatively in the present moment.

ACCEPTANCE

In cultivating the quality of acceptance, we allow our thoughts, feelings and experiences to be just as they are. This goes hand-in-hand with non-attachment. We learn to let go of resistance and open up to all aspects of our internal and external experience in their entirety. It is the act of completely and totally seeing the situation for what it is. This means being willing to fully accept painful, joyous, and neutral experiences. We notice and we acknowledge the fact.

In our meditation practice we can accept external distractions, accept body pain, accept difficult emotions and accept our imperfect meditation practice. In our daily lives we can notice we are sad, we are disappointed, we are ashamed, we drink too much or talk too much or don't have as much energy as we would like. When we stop

running from what troubles us, we can identify and tend to the true causes of our suffering. We can then take action based on reality.

Acceptance is a very active process, there is nothing passive about it, it's not passive resignation but an act of recognition that things are the way they are... Acceptance doesn't mean we can't work to change the world, or circumstances, but it means that unless we accept things as they are, we will try to force things to be as they are not and that can create an enormous amount of difficulty

Jon Kabat-Zinn

Just because we choose to accept our full range of thoughts, emotions, experiences and circumstances doesn't mean we like, approve or condone them. It simply means that you recognise their presence with mindful awareness. You are no longer ignoring or resisting what is.

PATIENCE

When it comes to benefitting from mindfulness, results rarely happen immediately so you need to develop patience. Patience is a virtue, as the old proverb says, and it is another quality that supports us in our practice and in having more peace in our daily lives. Impatience leads to frustration, which leads to aversion, which leads to suffering, whereas patience allows us to remain calm and present in situations that may bore or frustrate us.

In meditation, boredom may arise or the body will desire to move. In daily life we might have to wait in a queue or get stuck in traffic. If we have cultivated patience in our meditation practice, it will be much easier for us to embody this quality when we need it in our lives.

COMPASSION

Compassion for both ourselves and others is a beautiful quality to bring to our practice. There are times when our experience in meditation can be quite challenging and confronting. When we sit and pay attention to our inner world all sorts of thoughts and feelings can arise. Sometimes these can be critical, hurtful or ignite anger and hatred towards ourselves or others.

When we are gently reminded to gift ourselves and others compassion, we help to diffuse the strong thoughts and emotions. Compassion is a deeply healing energy and can help us to neutralise hurts from the past.

Using our meditations to practice compassion also helps to infuse our daily lives with this quality. If we can easily send ourselves and others compassion when things get

hard or difficult, we can avoid creating drama, conflict and resentment which helps everyone to live more peacefully.

Especially when living with fibromyalgia, huge quantities of compassion are essential. Those of us with the condition know just how hard it is but many of the people surrounding us do not. It can feel isolating and overwhelming. Being able to send ourselves compassion and kindness in the face of our suffering can be helpful.

THE FOUR FOUNDATIONS OF MINDFULNESS

THE FIRST FOUNDATION:

CONTEMPLATION OF THE BODY

The first foundation aims to connect participants to the sense perceptions of the body: breathing, physical sensations, touching, hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting and movement.

The foundational practice anchors awareness on the breath as a point of focus. This allows us to explore the subtle physical sensations associated with breathing and to observe changes in the breath. As other physical sensations, thoughts and emotions arise, we observe them with curiosity and then gently guide our attention back to the breath.

As we progress, we can alter the primary focus of attention. Meditating on sounds, the body and movement are some examples. There is also the eating exercise which invites us to become very slow, deliberate and curious while eating a simple piece of food.

The meditation on sounds is an opportunity to intimately connect with the sense of hearing. The focus in this practice is listening while noting with equanimity any thoughts, feelings or sensations that arise. In exploring the soundscape of the surrounding environment, participants aim to hear without identifying, labeling or analysing what is perceived. This practice assists in present moment awareness by carefully attuning to inputs from the external environment. Tapping into this state of sensing helps to activate the mode of 'being' as opposed to 'doing'. This can help to interrupt ruminative style thinking as well as the negative emotional habits and physiological responses that may be associated with the 'doing' mode.

The movement practice further cultivates body awareness whilst observing associated thoughts and feelings. This meditation offers an opportunity to check in with the body in order to feel and learn while undertaking a series of gentle movements inspired by yoga.

When viewed with attentive curiosity, the body 'will end up teaching you what you need to know to best ensure its well-being moment-by-moment'

This practice also provides an opportunity to explore thoughts and beliefs related to our body's capabilities and restrictions. Thoughts are observed with curiosity and it may be appropriate to question the validity of these beliefs as some people construct a psychological life around their preoccupation with illness, injury, or disability. Such habitual thinking can cause unnecessary secondary suffering and this practice can provide an opportunity to become aware of such self-limiting beliefs and to choose an alternative narrative. Limits are always explored with kindness and respect for oneself and the stretches and exercises are gentle and adaptable to all body conditions making it accessible to participants with pain, injury or illness.

This process helps to cultivate present moment awareness while undertaking physical movement.

It demonstrates that meditation can be dynamic and not just done in a still position. This skill translates well into daily life as participants learn how to be mindful in movement and respect their physical limitations day to day. When living with fibromyalgia, it is often true that 'motion is lotion' so a practice that involves movement can be more conducive to a state of comfort and less mental agitation.

Through the various body awareness practices, participants start to notice the relationship to and interpretation of their senses and the world. By paying attention and carefully noticing sense perceptions, participants may realise that often sensory input is dulled down and tuned out or, overly sensitised. This is particularly relevant when living with symptoms of fibromyalgia.

Regular practice establishes intimate contact with the body and cultivates deep awareness of the everchanging sensations that are felt within it.

The practices facilitate a state of sensing and being rather than thinking and conceptualizing. Cultivating this interoception leads to an increase awareness of our moment-to-moment experience and guides us to be in touch with how the body feels.



THE SECOND FOUNDATION:

CONTEMPLATION OF FEELING

(pleasant, unpleasant or neutral)

In this context, the word “feeling” here does not refer to emotion but to the bare affective tone of all mental and physical experience, whether pleasant, painful, or neutral.

Within the Buddhist philosophy, these feelings are of special importance because pleasant feelings can trigger craving, greed and attachment, painful feelings can provoke aversion, and neutral feelings can sustain delusion, manifesting as apathy and complacency. Turning a feeling into an object of mindfulness can defuse the feeling so that it doesn't trigger an unconscious reaction.

As we practice we will naturally have thoughts that will trigger an emotion and overlaying that will be a sense of pleasure, pain or neither. When being mindful of these states we direct our focus of attention onto the coming and going of these feeling tones. 'I notice aversion to pain' ... 'I notice craving for food' ... 'I notice apathy for my brother-in-law'. Left unchecked these can drive behaviour and background stress.

If we can recognise the affective tone in our present moment experience, we can interrupt mental reactions and elaborations and remain calm and non-reactive in respect to feelings.

Overtime, our attention reveals that these feelings of attachment, aversion and apathy are constantly arising and dissolving, one after another without a pause. This marks the beginning of insight into the nature of impermanence and presents an opportunity to intervene in the cycle of suffering. The more we witness this impermanence, the less we grip onto experiences and things.

We are then provided with the space and consciousness to respond with consideration and skill rather than unconsciously reacting to life circumstances.



THE THIRD FOUNDATION:

CONTEMPLATION OF MIND-STATES

This foundation concerns watching our general mental state, focusing on the ethical qualities of the mind. This is a different mind from the one that thinks thoughts or makes judgments. It is more like a tone of consciousness. Mind-states could include degrees of lust, greed, hatred, annoyance, obsessiveness, paranoia, craving, optimism, excitement, anticipation, despair or many other underlying states that come and go. When a particular state of mind is present, it is noted merely as a state of mind, not identified as 'I' or 'mine'. We do not cling to the desired ones or resent the undesired ones. You may acknowledge to yourself 'noticing craving'... 'noticing excitement' and observe what this does to the state of the mind.

We learn to observe our mental states without judgment or opinion. As they come and go, we clearly understand how impermanent they are.

The practice of meditating on mind-states requires participants to use the flow of thoughts through the mind as the focus of attention, without becoming attached and caught up in their content.

Mental formations such memories, plans, analysis, fantasy, likes, dislikes and constructs of 'I', 'me' and 'mine' come and go in a constant stream of mental activity, coming from nowhere and going nowhere, continuing in sequence without pause.

The aim of the practice is to cultivate the ability to see these thought forms as impermanent and always changing. The task is not to try and stop the arising of thoughts but to allow them to exist without judgment.

'What matters is whether you are aware of your thoughts and feelings during meditation and how you handle them'

Jon Kabat-Zinn

We see that the mind has a mind of its own, that we are often not consciously deciding what to think. When we take the time to observe we may start to notice tendencies of rumination, obsessiveness, judgment, desire, clinging, aversion and reaction both towards the events of our life and towards the thought forms themselves. We may see how one thought triggers another and gain insight into our habitual patterns and associations, the stories we tell ourselves and the tendency to obsess during times of stress.

In a broader application we can see how our unchecked mind can create chronic states of stress and dis-ease which can manifest as physical illness in the body.

A powerful analogy for me is that of a theatre play. When I am caught up in my thoughts I am an actor on the stage, fully immersed in the story of my life. When I am practicing conscious awareness I am a member of the audience, watching the drama unfold in front of me with curious detachment.



THE FOURTH FOUNDATION:

CONTEMPLATION OF ALL PHENOMENA

In the open awareness practice, the skills of each of the techniques already discussed are combined in an expansive field of awareness. In this meditation all phenomena that arises and passes as part of the human experience is observed mindfully, without judgment or attachment. Thoughts, feelings, sensations, emotions, sounds and the breath are all acknowledged as they arise and pass in each moment.

The practice includes noticing the content of thoughts, intensity, accompanying feelings or emotions and the qualities of the breath and body position at the time. From this careful observation we can gain valuable insight into the interconnectedness of mind, body and feelings and begin to gain some influence on the way these phenomena unfold within us.

Great insight can be attained through this practice as we come to see clearly the ephemeral nature of sense impressions and the impact of their patterns and connections. We practice awareness of the inter-existence of all things. We are aware that they are temporary, without self-essence and conditioned by everything else.

By noticing and then letting go of these experiences, we cultivate the attitude of non-attachment to any and all aspects of our lives. From this place, we may see the aspect of our self that is beyond body, name, thoughts, feelings, ideas, opinions and concepts. Through this process we get in touch with the essence of our pure awareness, which is still and peaceful.

*Within the Buddhist philosophy,
this is considered the attaining of wisdom.*

During this practice, we can start to observe the 'Six Sense Media' and the arising of the 'Five Aggregates', the 'Five Hindrances' and the 'Seven Factors of Awakening'.

The five hindrances of sensual desire, ill-will, dullness and drowsiness, restlessness and worry, and doubt will naturally arise during our practice. In this state of observing all phenomena, we can notice when one of these hindering states appear. Its presence is noted, and when it fades away, its disappearance is noted. We are instructed not merely to just note the hindrances, but to discern how they arise, how they can be removed, and how they can be prevented from arising in the future.

We may also notice The Seven Factors of Enlightenment at play: mindfulness, investigation of phenomena, energy, joy, tranquillity, concentration and equanimity. As each factor arises, we note its presence and how it arises.

When they are hindrances, we want to loosen our attachments and abandon them; when they are factors of awakening, which are beneficial for the growth of understanding, we are invited to cultivate, develop and strengthen them.

This takes our practice beyond passive observation into the realm of transformation.

As our practice fully develops, we hone our ability to see ever more closely what's happening, we see more and more of these episodes of awareness arising and passing away. We see clearly the root cause and end of suffering and experience The Four Noble Truths first-hand. This fulfils the Buddha's promise that The Four Foundations of Mindfulness lead to the end of suffering and the realisation of nirvana.



IN SUMMARY

Each foundation explored aims to achieve the same objective of cultivating mindfulness in both a formal and informal setting. Although the focus of attention varies, the intention of cultivating conscious awareness of the present moment is shared. The ability to be aware of a thought, emotion or physical sensation without judgment and with self-compassion is the successful execution of mindfulness practice. Through a strong cultivation of this skill, liberation from stress and suffering can be achieved.

As we become more adept at relating to our thoughts and associated emotions in this way we become empowered with the ability to respond to stressful or challenging situations rather than reacting in habitual or unhealthy ways.

These practices can be challenging, frustrating, insightful and rewarding. The effect on personal wellbeing will pay off and create a more peaceful and happy life.

WHAT NEXT?

Are you interested in experiencing the benefits of mindfulness in your own life?

Befriending the Body will be offering regular online courses exploring The Four Foundations of Mindfulness for fibromyalgia. Having been diagnosed with fibromyalgia myself in 2001, I know how challenging it can be to manage symptoms, stress and your state of mind when living with chronic pain. I personally found Buddhist philosophy and a regular mindfulness practice to be highly beneficial and it has definitely been a cornerstone of my path to improvement.

The Four Foundations course builds on the concepts outlined in this E-Book and guides participants through a variety of meditation and mindfulness practices. There will be a combination of live online Zoom sessions, recorded practices and Q&A. Two of the benefits of the course include having access to an experienced teacher and having a community to meditate with. If you find the course valuable, it can be repeated each time it is run in order to gain increasingly deeper understanding of the philosophy and practices.

Also on offer will be separate weekly drop-in online meditation classes for casual attendance to support your ongoing practice. This helps to establish the ongoing habit of regular meditation and provides further opportunity to learn, ask questions and connect with others.

To stay informed about when the course and classes will be offered, sign up to Befriending the Body's newsletter [here](#). When you sign up you will receive a free copy of the E-Book 'Fibromyalgia Foundations' which outlines 10 essential elements to help you heal.

For regular tips on living with fibromyalgia and for a central location to find some of the best and latest fibromyalgia research, follow **Befriending the Body** on social media.



If you'd like to know more about the consultation and coaching services offered, head to the website [here](#).

Wishing you all the very best with your mindful journey ahead

