

MINDFULNESS AND ADDICTION – THE BENEFITS

Apart from the general principles of mindfulness outlined in previous chapters, there are some particular points worth making that can help an addicted person manage their addiction. A few of these are summarized below.

- **Mental health.** Improving mental health and managing stress is central to removing the hidden drivers to addictive behaviours.
- **Imagination.** The tendency to daydream about the substance or behaviour, imagining how happy we think we would be with it and how unhappy we are without it, leaves us vulnerable to relapse. This is almost like meditating on our object of desire, which only breeds attraction for it and keeps reactivating the circuits feeding addiction. Practising giving attention to our day-to-day life as well as learning formal mindfulness practices leave us far less vulnerable.
- **Urge-surfing.** Urges will arise. Our experience teaches us that fighting with them only draws more attention to them and creates tension, and sooner or later we give in. Urge-surfing means being able to observe the urge, and even the thoughts about the urge, but respond more gently than we usually do. This means accepting our urges and letting go, not suppressing them — let the urge flow in and through you with less and less reaction or engagement with it. We don't even have to think that the urges shouldn't be there. In fact, we can welcome them every time they arise — as opportunities to be free of them.

- **Engagement.** Greater engagement with life and our enjoyment of it through giving more attention to it is vital to fill the vacuum left by the addiction when it's no longer there. Really tasting our food, really seeing the sunset, really noticing our child or dog playing in the park, smelling the roses or daffodils or gerberas — all the simple, wonderful moments can make our life much fuller and more sustaining.

By all means, if dealing with a significant addiction, please seek the support of a suitably trained health professional rather than trying to do it by yourself.

TAKE-HOME TIPS FOR A MINDFUL RESPONSE TO ADDICTION

NOT SO HELPFUL

- Lie to yourself or others by thinking that what's hurting us is normal or okay or unavoidable.
- Put off seeking help when you know you need it.

HELPFUL

- Be aware that something you want badly might be an addiction or the start of one. See what happens when you try not to do it for a day or two.
- Be aware that you can be addicted to things that aren't usually thought of as addictions.
- Be aware that if you keep living in a stressed or unfulfilled state you risk developing new addictions or re-inventing old ones.