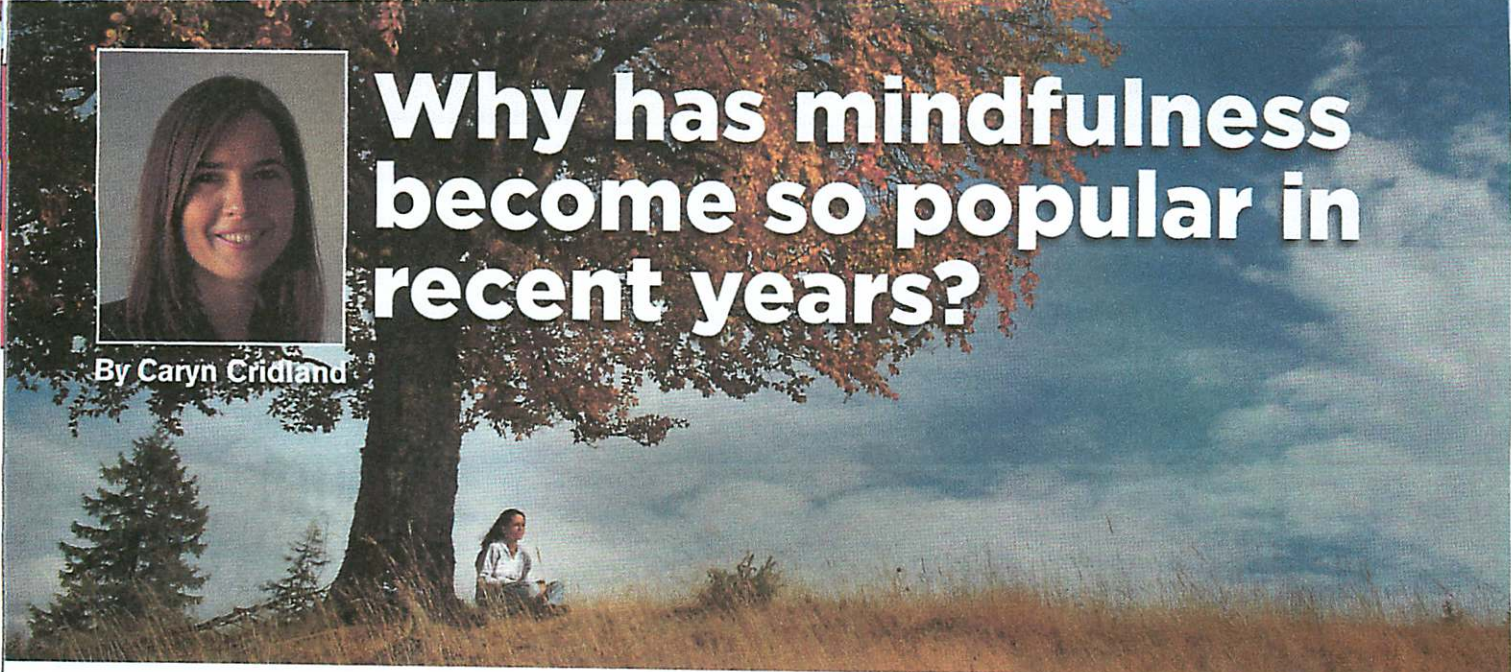




By Caryn Cridland

Why has mindfulness become so popular in recent years?



Mindfulness is a bit of a buzz word at the moment, with mindfulness practices popping up in every area imaginable – mindfulness meditation, mindful eating, mindful listening, mindful therapies and mindfulness at work, to name just a few.

Ten years ago, it was reported that over 240 hospitals, clinics and other health-related settings worldwide were offering some type of mindfulness training. In 2013, this figure could now represent the number in Australia alone!

Personally, I am looking forward to the day when the mindfulness concept spreads into other areas of life too. Can you imagine if mindfulness was introduced into pubs and bars so that people pay more attention to their bodies when ingesting harmful substances? Perhaps this might reduce the number of hangovers! Considering that wine tasting is all about savouring delicate flavors slowly, then maybe this is not as bizarre a concept as it at first seems.

So what is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is simply awareness of what is taking place in the present moment. This applies to events taking place within the body, the mind and external environments. Mindfulness has been described as *"Paying attention on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience, moment by moment"* (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Mindfulness is a non-judgmental, receptive mind state where individuals observe their thoughts and feelings as they arise, without trying to change them or push them away, and without letting them take over. Some describe mindfulness as a meta-view or a helicopter view of ourselves, others and our environment. It is seeing things from above – for example, watching a conversation unfold between ourselves and another person – perceiving the emotions in our self and the other, listening to each of our words, noting what we are both saying and not saying.

What are the benefits of mindfulness?

The benefits of mindfulness are wide, diverse, and clear.

To name just a few, mindfulness has been associated with increases in compassion, emotional wellbeing and relaxation, overall quality of life, awareness of beliefs and emotions, self-regulation, self-exploration and self-actualization. It has also been seen to increase productivity in business.

The reported health benefits are vast, including decreases in anxiety, stress, pain and depression, and increased cardiac output, slower heart rate, decreased blood pressure and increased longevity.

Note that much of this kind of research is conducted on people who are regularly practising mindfulness over a period of time – months or years.

Research is great – but what about real-life?

What is important is not so much what the research says, but are you going to take up meditating one hour a day? Great if you are. It is highly recommended, but what if you are time poor and/or you can only manage a few minutes a day? Well, every little bit counts, and it is more about what you do as a result of the meditation or mindfulness practice than it is about the actual practice itself.

An alternative to throwing yourself fully into meditation is starting small and training yourself to enjoy richer moments throughout the day. Even seconds are better than nothing!

Mindfulness is simple!

Mindfulness is not a concept that is complex, unattainable or even requiring a great deal of practice. What mindfulness is – is waking up to life. Being here right now. Or as Thich Nhat Hanh would say – turning up for our appointment with life (Thich Nhat Hanh,

2010). Mindfulness is being aware of how we are actually feeling, what we are thinking and what we are doing, without believing that our feelings, thoughts and behaviours are us.

We can observe them, sure, and they are an important part of the person we call "I" or "me". They are not, however, all of us (or all of "me" or "I").

We are so much more than our fears, our hopes or our dreams. For despite our fears, our hopes and our dreams, we are alive, living in this moment. Our fears, hopes and dreams change over time; we, however, always remain. (At least until we pass on!).

Why not try some mindfulness today?

Notice what is happening for you in this moment? Is there someone talking beside you at work? Can you hear the birds singing?

At home is the TV on? Can you smell food being cooked in the kitchen? Can you feel the cool night air of winter? Can you hear the breath of your sleeping child on your chest as you read your emails? Can you see the moon breaking through the trees? Can you taste the flavour in your food? Are you tired, hungry or angry?

Spend a couple of minutes each day checking-in with yourself and commence your journey into mindfulness and wellness.

Caryn Cridland is the Founder of Mindful Mediation. She is a registered psychologist, lawyer and nationally accredited mediator with close to 10 years combined international experience in workplace, family and community mediation. Caryn specialises in workplace mediation, facilitation, coaching, training, team building and leadership. She runs a range of workplace mediation training programs and is also a professional speaker. You can find out more about Caryn at www.mindfulmediation.com.au