

Oasis in a Covid Storm

Vanessa Gilbert – Feb 19th 2021

Vanessa gave us a brilliant zoom session.

She described how the body responds to stress and made the case that this response is essentially 'out of date' as it has evolved to deal with the situation where our lives are actually in danger. With frequent or continuous stress, our body is releasing various biochemicals and physiological reactions which, in the long term, affects our health with things like high blood pressure, digestion problems and anxiety. All this is made worse because the brain has evolved to easily remember negative experiences, whilst remembering positive experiences has to be worked at and the brain's plasticity responds.

Meditation is a technique to help deal with these body responses and characteristics. It can sound as though it's a life's work, but Vanessa described, and got us to practice, some simple informal techniques which can be done at almost any time. "Quietly brilliant moments' is how she described them - like stroking the cat consciously; or putting chocolate, a grape or wine into your mouth because you enjoy the flavour. The idea is to savour it and explore it to the full, before swallowing. Simple breathing exercise like breathing in (abdominally if you can) as you count to two, then out for 2, then increase the number doing 4 in and out. She suggested movement could accompany it and music could be also included. The whole aim is to slow things down, calming oneself through eating, breathing and movement, and doing it in a mindful way- concentrating on what you are doing. She then took us through a more formal meditation where we were asked to concentrate on our breathing and sensing our body from the fingertips through the head and body to our toes. Falling asleep was a risk!

As we joined her doing all these things a calmness and 'oneness with the world' descended. She herself projects calmness and positivity- no doubt the result of making it an integral part of her life. It really was a most interesting and enjoyable session that taught us how to calm ourselves in modern day life with its mix of demands and stresses. It was good to have her advice and guidance to pick up on.

Maybe for each of us, a quick session of breathing, or intense concentration on food or drink in your mouth will become a 'go to' de-stressor that is part of daily life.

You can find out more on

[Mindful-ness - Mindfulness and Meditation for everyday life \(mindful-ness.co.uk\)](https://www.mindful-ness.co.uk/)