

What is Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)?

MBCT is based on the Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) eight week program, developed by Jon Kabat Zinn in 1979 at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. Research shows that MBSR is enormously empowering for patients with chronic pain, hypertension, heart disease, cancer, and gastrointestinal disorders, as well as for psychological problems such as anxiety and panic. Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy grew from this work. Zindel Segal, Mark Williams and John Teasdale adapted the MBSR program so it could be used especially for people who had suffered repeated bouts of depression in their lives.

The UK *National Institute of Clinical Excellence* (NICE) has recently endorsed MBCT as an effective treatment for prevention of relapse. Research has shown that people who have been clinically depressed 3 or more times (sometimes for twenty years or more) find that taking the program and learning these skills helps to reduce considerably their chances that depression will return.

MBCT Classes

Classes meet two hours a week for eight weeks. However, the main ‘work’ is done at home between classes. There is a set of CDs to accompany the program, which you use to practice on your own at home once a day. During the classes, there is an opportunity to talk about your experiences with the home practices, the obstacles that inevitably arise, and how to deal with them skillfully.

The specific themes addressed in the program are: **Class 1:** Automatic Pilot; **Class 2:** Dealing with Barriers; **Class 3:** Mindfulness of the Breath; **Class 4:** Staying Present; **Class 5:** Allowing and Letting Be; **Class 6:** Thoughts are Not Facts; **Class 7:** How Can I Best Take Care of Myself; **Class 8:** Using What’s Been Learned to Deal with Future Moods.

Over the eight weeks of the program, the mindfulness practices taught in class help you:

- to become familiar with the workings of your mind.
- to notice the times when you are at risk of getting caught in old habits of mind that re-activate downward mood spirals.
- to explore ways of releasing yourself from those old habits and, if you choose, enter a different way of being.
- to put you in touch with a different way of knowing yourself and the world.
- to notice small beauties and pleasures in the world around you instead of living in your head.
- to be kind to yourself instead of wishing things were different all the time, or driving yourself to meet impossible goals.
- to find a way so you don’t have to battle with yourself all the time.
- to accept yourself as you are, rather than judging yourself all the time.

How will MBCT help me prevent depression relapse?

- It will help you understand what depression and is.
- It will help you discover what makes you vulnerable to downward mood spirals, and why you get stuck at the bottom of the spiral.
- It will help you see the connection between downward spirals, and:
 - High standards that oppress us.
 - Feelings that we are simply “not good enough.”
 - Ways we put pressure on ourselves or make ourselves miserable with overwork.
 - Ways we lose touch with what makes life worth living.

The discovery that, even when people feel well, the link between negative moods and negative thoughts remains ready to be re-activated, is of enormous importance. It means that sustaining recovery from such depression depends on learning how to keep mild states of depression from spiraling out of control.