

Andy Puddicombe
is bringing
mindfulness to
the masses

THIS MAN WILL MAKE YOU CALM

*Meditation improves mood,
makes you calmer, less stressed,
and more focused. Red has
linked up with Headspace to
cheer up your start to the year*

Words Sally Brown

A strange thing happened while I was talking to Andy Puddicombe, the man credited with making meditation mainstream. Tension seemed to gently unravel, I began to feel more clear-headed. Perhaps it's not surprising, given that he spent 10 years living as a Buddhist monk in India, Nepal, Burma and Thailand.

But it may be because I associate Puddicombe with calm; I've been doing his Headspace app pretty regularly for over a year. I'm far from alone: so far, it's been downloaded by over one million people around the world, including Gwyneth Paltrow and Emma Watson (who called him a 'kind of genius').

Headspace works precisely because Puddicombe is the antithesis of the cheesy, fake-smiled self-help guru. He makes meditation normal: his accent is more Bristol than mid-Atlantic twang, even though he's lived in LA for going on three years.

At the recent London launch of the new version of the Headspace app, he dressed down in an open-necked shirt and chinos. His answers to questions he's no doubt been asked a million times before were thoughtful and courteous, and peppered with easy laughter. Talking about his decision to leave the monastery, he told me, 'I thought, "Am I passionate about being a monk, or am I passionate about teaching meditation?" I knew some people wouldn't get the bald-headed-man-in-a-skirt thing.'

SO WHY SHOULD I MEDITATE? Puddicombe thinks it's the growing bank of science behind meditation that's partly to thank for its massive popularity right now. You've probably heard: meditation boosts mood, reduces your chances of feeling depressed, lowers stress and increases mental focus. It's hard to see why, this year, you wouldn't want to make it a new habit.

As Puddicombe points out, mindfulness only works *if you do it*. I know meditation resets my default mood to a couple of degrees happier, while simultaneously turning down my stress thermostat. And yet I still find myself just not doing it for days at a time. >>



‘It’s a curious paradox,’ says Puddicombe. ‘I often speak to people who have fallen off the proverbial meditation wagon, and they will say, “Wow, I used to feel so good when I meditated every day,” and I’ll say, “Sure, so why don’t you still do it now?” and they’ll usually say something like, “Hmmm, good question, not sure really.”’

So what to do? Take time after each meditation to reflect on exactly how it makes you feel, ‘because the mind sometimes needs prompting, prodding, reminding, reflecting, to actually establish that this is something positive, something that leaves you feeling physically more relaxed, mentally more calm, and emotionally more grounded’.

Finding an answer to this paradox is clearly one of Puddicombe’s passions, and was part of the motivation behind launching an updated version of the Headspace app. ‘[With the original app] just over 60% of users used it every one to three days, and we’d like to see that get to 80%,’ he says. ‘The new version includes a buddy system, so you can see when your friends are meditating and give them a nudge or say well done.’ It also includes a personalised progress page and three-minute SOS meditations (see below).

There’s even a programme aimed at improving relationships – something Puddicombe describes as ‘the most neglected aspect of mind training’. ‘When meditation came from the east to the west, for some reason it quickly became about “me, myself and I”. But the way it is traditionally taught is that mindfulness is not about you,’ he says.

Mindfulness transformed his own relationships, says Puddicombe. ‘The relationships I have now have a greater sense of ease, calm, patience and understanding,’ he says. ‘I’m far from the manifestation of perfect mindfulness... but I think what I have now is a greater willingness to let it go.’

Puddicombe met his wife Lucinda, a physiotherapist, in London in 2006. Like her husband, Lucinda loves the ‘beach and yoga’ lifestyle of LA. ‘We’re not big socialisers,’ says Puddicombe. ‘We tend to cook and just hang out at home.’ The couple recently had their first child, son Harley, now aged three months, and are clearly relishing being parents – a blessing that may feel even more precious as Puddicombe was treated for testicular cancer in 2013.

Ten years ago, Puddicombe counted his possessions as little more than the clothes he stood up in. His meteoric success could be put down to ‘right place, right time’ – he arrived in London soon after mindfulness was given official NICE approval as a treatment for depression. And he launched the app just as the whole app thing exploded. But after talking to him for an hour, I feel convinced there’s more to it. He doesn’t want to be a guru, but he’s got an innate wisdom about what really matters in life. And, more than

TURN BLUE MONDAY *Red*

Winter doesn’t have to be blue! Join us on Blue Monday – unofficially, January 26th – which has been slated as the most miserable day of the year. Don’t let it be. Join *Red* at 1pm for a mass 10-minute meditation. Download Headspace Take 10 (headspace.com), do your 10 minutes, then tweet us how you feel (@RedMagDaily) #Redspace. Ten tweeters will win the book *Get Some Headspace: 10 Minutes Can Make All the Difference* (Hodder, £6.99). If you’re a beginner, hopefully it’ll be the start of a special relationship with meditation. *Take 10 is 10 daily 10-minute guided meditations for free. Sign up for the full programme afterwards from £3.74 a month.*

anything, he makes me want to meditate. So I asked his advice on how to do it, and how to keep going.

WHAT IF I HAVEN’T GOT TIME? ‘We’re talking about 10, 15 or 20 minutes a day, an amount of time we wouldn’t think twice about putting aside for a cup of tea, a sitcom or a book,’ says Puddicombe. ‘It’s simple really. You try it and if you feel better, you will probably want to do some more.’

DO I HAVE TO SIT DOWN TO DO IT? ‘The idea of mediation that involves sitting in the lotus position is not what we’re about. Headspace On-The-Go meditations can be applied to everyday activities such as commuting and eating.’

IS 10 MINUTES REALLY ENOUGH? ‘Yes, if you can do 10 minutes a day for 10 days that should be long enough for you to start to feel the benefits for yourself. After that it’s up to you whether you’d like to continue and learn more.’

BUT I FIND IT FRUSTRATING... ‘Feelings of frustration are normal. The important thing to be aware of is that this is part of the journey. Until the mind is comfortable just resting in one place, we treat every new distraction in the same way. If the mind has wandered off, we simply acknowledge it, let it go and bring the attention back to the object of the exercise.’

...OR JUST A BIT BORING? ‘As I say, it is very normal to experience uncomfortable feelings. But it’s worth considering how much those feelings are the result of judgements on our performance within the practice.’

WHY DO I FIND IT SO HARD TO CLEAR MY MIND? ‘The aim is acceptance, learning to step back and get a different perspective on thought, rather than stopping thought altogether. Meditation is a bit like falling asleep or falling in love – you can’t make it happen! It is a natural process of unwinding that requires surprisingly little effort.’

I TRIED IT FOR A WHILE THEN I STOPPED. HOW CAN I KEEP GOING? ‘What’s great about Take 10 (Headspace’s free 10-minute meditation) is it’s an introductory programme. After that, you can go on to Take 15 and Take 20 until it becomes embedded in your routine. Hopefully, with the benefits you start seeing, you won’t want to stop.’

THE INSTANT SOS CALM DOWN

- 1 Find a quiet place where you can relax. Take five deep breaths, in through your nose and out through your mouth. On the last exhalation, close your eyes. Settle into your body, taking note of your posture and how you feel.
- 2 Turn your mind inwards and take note of your body from head to toe, acknowledging any tension or discomfort. Scan through your body again, noticing the parts that start to relax. Turn your mind to your thoughts. Notice which ones come up without trying to alter them.
- 3 Slowly count your breaths up to a count of 10: one (in), two (out), etc. If your mind wanders, just gently bring it back to the counting.
- 4 Continue counting, then before you open your eyes, allow your mind to be completely free. 🧘