

INTERVIEW

Mindfulness

Staying internally calm when the world is wobbling.



The pandemic, the war in Eastern Europe and the energy crisis: these circumstances have had and still have a large impact on many of us, leaving us restless. How do you stay calm when the world around you is not? Mindfulness can provide a sense of calm, allowing you to stand steadily when the world is wobbling. Coming fall, Avansa Oostende Westhoek organizes a mindfulness group training, in collaboration with Marisa Hoslet and the Centrum voor Mindful Leven. The course takes place in proximity to the beach and the rushing sound of the sea.

Marisa Hoslet's story starts on the sandy beach of Ostend. She discovered her love for basketball in this city by the sea. Eventually she became a member of the Belgian women's national team. 'I started playing basketball at the age of 8 and started at the 1st national team when I was 17. But my passion for sports was overshadowed by large amounts of stress and performance pressure. I felt that I had to stay close to myself and had to start taking breaks or stop moments. This is how meditation, yoga and mindfulness came on my path,' she explains.

'At the time, I was combining professional basketball with a job as a teacher and student counselor. There as well, I noticed that stress and physical struggles became a bigger and bigger problem. To learn more about this topic, I started a Master in Clinical Psychology at

Ghent University and took an MBSR trainer course at the Center for Mindfulness in Worcester (US), created by John Kabat Zinn, founder of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction. During my thesis research, I was able to prove that MBSR can help increasing the life quality of CFS patients. Practicing mindfulness helped these people to manage anxiety, stress and depression better.'

To see what is

'During recent research at the VUB, in collaboration with the BRUCC, we found that MBSR also had an effect in times of corona and war. We observed that the stress levels of the participants lowered and that their life quality increased. MBSR is about the way one deals with stress,' Marisa Hoslet continues.

'The issue is that we are constantly in our minds and thoughts. The majority of those thoughts are about the future and the past. The goal of mindfulness is to focus your attention on the present. For a brief moment, you let go of all the thoughts of later on and tomorrow and occupy yourself only with what you are doing right now. Mindfulness does not change the circumstances. It doesn't reduce financial stress or brush off the risk of getting covid, but MBSR does teach you to "live well" in the circumstances as they are.

How? By finding peace within yourself, which helps reducing the pressure from the outside world. Firstly, you learn to stop. You become more aware of how you are living. How do I currently function? How is it going and how do I feel right now? Awareness is the first step to change. A second step is practicing meditation and yoga. Which thoughts are swirling through my head? How do I feel? From there, you learn to observe life differently. And that is how you add quality to your life and start to enjoy things more. It's not a quick fix, but it is a method and a manner in which to experience life that is only possible when you practice every single day.'

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Close to the sea

'This training takes place in the swimming pool Brigitte Becue, at walking distance from the beach. The integration of nature elements is also part of MBSR. Meditation is more than sitting quietly in a soundproof room. It becomes so much more powerful when you incorporate the environment. And even more so when this includes the rushing sounds of the waves, the whistling of the wind and the sound of shrieking seagulls. In this training, we will often seek the vastness of the beach for a walking meditation and to do yoga exercises,' Marisa Hoslet explains.

Being Resilient Together

'This training starts during the campaign Resilient Together, and that is very deliberately,' says Caroline Deknudt, educational assistant at Avansa Oostende-Westhoek. 'We want to highlight the importance of mental health and resilience. This training is a great way to check

in with yourself. How do I improve my mental resilience and also remain supportive to others? In short, do I take good care of myself and those around me?’

Marisa Hoslet works at the VUB and the Brussels University Consultation Center (BRUCC). In addition, she runs her own practice called [Centrum voor Mindful Leven](#).

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