

# “Making Space for What’s Important”

## Interview Catholic News Agency

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*While the world moves ever faster and faster, one trend has the potential to counteract it: mindfulness. Andreas de Bruin has made mindful living his profession. He teaches and conducts research on the effects of mindfulness and meditation at the Munich University of Applied Sciences and the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (LMU) in Munich, and is the initiator of the “Munich Model”, an initiative to integrate mindful, meditative content into the context of university education. In an interview, he explains the phenomenon of mindfulness.*

**Mr. de Bruin, what exactly does mindfulness mean?**

Mindfulness means consciously perceiving the current state – just observing, not evaluating, seeing things anew. This can be related to physical reactions, thoughts, emotions or our direct environment, such as other people and nature.

**Why do you think there is this mindfulness boom?**

We have overshot the goal: too much individualism and emphasis on our own ideals at the expense of others, over consumption, the hectic pace of life, our loss of connection to the natural environment. The mind and intellect have also been assigned too much importance. The heart and love have fallen by the wayside. Mindfulness helps many people to relax and to come closer to their true self. The common good also regains its importance. Mindfulness exercises are also easy to practice. There are a variety of practices so that everyone can try out what suits them best. No costs are involved, so it’s available to everyone. And last but not least, even without extensive practice, one can experience the effects fairly quickly.

**What effects, for example?**

For example, improvement in mental hygiene, body awareness, concentration and selective awareness, self-efficacy, well-being and the regulation of emotions. If one combines mindfulness with exercises in compassion, it can improve the way you interact with yourself and your environment. The respected neuroscientist and mindfulness researcher, Richard Davidson says that, “Earth would be a different place if we spent the same short amount of time caring for our minds as we do brushing our teeth.” If one intensifies one’s own practice and practices regularly, the effects are more lasting.

Mindfulness is easy to incorporate into everyday life. Many everyday activities are well suited to this, for example eating, walking, talking to someone, cleaning, ironing clothes, washing dishes, listening to nature and much more. But you can also practice more structured exercises, such as sitting in silence for 15 to 20 minutes a day and watching the breath in a relaxed manner, or the “body scan” – a relaxation method in which you “wander” through your own body step by step with your attention and feel into the different parts of your body. The important thing is not to do all of this in a too intellectual and mechanical way, for example thinking, “I have to eat carefully now, I have to breathe carefully now.” The desire to be mindful should come from within. Mindfulness is an attitude. In the Christian tradition, for example, there are different forms of seeing: seeing through the senses, seeing through the mind and seeing with the heart. It is about this latter dimension. When mindfulness is combined with the heart, the practice becomes completely natural.

**You said that the exercises are easy to practice. What does this look like in everyday life?**

When most people wash dishes, their heads are somewhere else. Mindful dishwashing is: I observe that I’m washing, I feel that the water is warm, or it’s cold, how does the plate or the glass that I’m washing feel in my hands? When we learn to do these things more consciously again, we train our “muscles of awareness” so that we are more in the now with everything we do.

**How does mindful dishwashing work, for example?**

Research shows that in everyday life, we aren’t paying attention, we aren’t paying attention to what we are doing nearly half of the time. Through conscious awareness we can be more in the now, and the so-called mind-wandering – that is, the wandering of our thoughts – is reduced, so one is less distracted, recognizes more clearly what is important in life and acts accordingly. If you ask people who are in the process of dying what they regret most looking back at their lives, they say they would have liked to express more of their feelings, to have maintained more contact with friends, to have not worked so much and had the courage to live life that way as they would have liked. Mindfulness helps to make more space for what’s important. By not judging, we also learn to first pause in situations, and not to react too impulsively.

**Why should we be more mindful in our everyday life?**

I meditate for 20 minutes twice a day – one sitting meditation immediately after getting up and the other in late afternoon, usually at 5 p.m. I’ve been doing this since 1991. And, like brushing my teeth, it has become a routine. I also try to carry out many everyday activities more attentively, such as during my daily commute to work or in conversations with my students.

**Do you have daily mindfulness rituals yourself?**

Mindfully  
eating a raisin

