

Meditate your way to success

We've long known that monks who spend their lives in meditation are happier than the rest of us. Now experts are realising that the benefits of meditation are available without monk-like dedication. Just 20 minutes daily of 'mindfulness' meditation – a non-religious technique that focuses on breathing and the moment – can improve mood longterm. In one study from Dalian University in China, meditating for 20 minutes for just five consecutive days reduced the amount of the stress hormone cortisol and improved the ability to deal with conflict, depressive thoughts, anger and tiredness.

WHAT TO DO Possibly the cheapest emotional quick-fix, this easy meditation is available to you anywhere, anytime, says Cindy Cooper, mindfulness expert at Capio Nightingale mental health services.

'Whenever you feel stressed, angry, sad or fearful, stop what you are doing and bring your awareness to the breath. Place your hand on your stomach and feel the sensation and movement as you breathe in and out. Do this as you observe your emotions and the chances are, after a couple of minutes, the negativity will evaporate. First, the flow of increased oxygen to your brain has an instant calming effect. Secondly, shifting your focus to your breath immediately takes your attention away from the problem, decreasing your heart rate and literally calming you down from the inside out.'

Try a one-to-one mindfulness course at www.london-meditation.co.uk or read *The Mindful Way Through Depression* by J Mark G Williams (Guildford Press, £12.99), which includes an interactive CD.

If you have recurrent depression, speak to your GP as you may be entitled to a mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) course on the NHS.