Dear families,

I would like to express my gratitude to Mr Mathew Kelly who was Acting Principal during my recent leave. It was lovely to know that everything continued to move along whilst I was absent and the college was certainly left in good hands.

The United Kingdom welcomed me with warm humid weather, or as described in the media a heat wave. I had a wonderful time at a family celebration and touring London and the Scottish highlands. It was certainly relaxing and great to explore new places and meet new people. Meanwhile back at the college, the installation of the new play equipment began and was completed last Friday. There was tremendous excitement from all students and in particular our Year sixes who did a trial run prior to recess. It continues to be very well utilised during breaks and before and after school. It is a great new asset along with our AFL goal posts on the oval which were also installed recently.

This week we welcomed the Altona and Seaholme Primary School Year 5 students to experience a day in the life of a Year 7. They were very well supported by our Year 9 leaders. The visitors experienced the many “specialist subjects” of a secondary setting. We have a number of families already booked for tours in the coming weeks for 2016.

The Steps to Prep program commenced this week with some very excited participants. The program is free in term three for all interested families and in term 4 for all children enrolled for 2015. Please let your neighbours and friends know about the program. Bookings can be made through the office.

The choir entertained us at our fortnightly assembly on Monday for a practice session with an audience. They are working on a performance for the network Festival of the Performing Arts being held on Wednesday 27th August at Carranballac College and we look forward to seeing their development over the coming weeks.

Ms Carolina Cordeiro commenced in the role of garden specialist on Monday morning and the program will start with the students on Monday. Students from Years 2 to 6 will spend time each fortnight in the garden, planting, weeding, establishing seedlings and learning to develop an efficient edible garden etc. They will then be cooking each fortnight in the food technology centre. The Year Prep and One students will visit the garden for a session each fortnight and will have a kitchen experience each term. Mrs Staunton is looking for your support to assist with the cooking sessions and Ms Cordeiro would welcome support in the garden development. Our working bee on Saturday was well supported with the major irrigation system being added to the garden. The students will work with the garden specialist and parents to continue to develop the watering system. We are awaiting the planting of an orchard in the near future.

Our eLearning leaders from Year 5 and 6 are in the process of developing a cybersafety program to share with the school. It has been great to see their confidence grow as they have participated in the program over the past weeks.

The Student Representative Council have a number of sub-committees in operation. One team is working with the fundraising group to plan a disco whilst another are organising a support activity for Diabetes Victoria next Friday. Check out the newsletter for additional information. Thank you to all our students for their leadership over the past fortnight and the lovely welcome back I received last Monday.

Julie Krause
Principal
STUDENT WELLBEING NEWS

STEPS TO PREP

This week, saw the beginning of our 2014 STEPS to PREP program. This program is designed to prepare preschool children for the transition to school. The students who attended this week’s session presented with such enthusiasm and an obvious love of learning. As our STEPS to PREP program continues to grow, so to will our links with the local community. If you are aware of any families who would be interested in participating in this program, please advise them to contact the office. The program runs each Thursday during Term 3 (9-11am) and will continue in Term 4 for those students who are enrolled at Altona P-9 for 2015.

Grill’d & Smiling Mind Local Matters Initiative

As mentioned in Term 3, during the month of August, Altona Prep-9 College will be the recipient of a month-long Local Matters’ campaign that Smiling Mind is undertaking with Grill’d stores nationally. Altona P-9 College is fortunate to be the designated recipient of the Grill’d Point Cook store Local Matters campaign.

Each month, Grill’d stores undertake a ‘Local Matters’ initiative to support local groups / causes within the community.

Customers of Grill’d will be given a token to place into a jar. Each jar represents a local group. Altona P-9 College will be one of the three groups supported by Grill’d Point Cook. The more tokens placed into the Altona P-9 College (jar), the more chance that the College will receive Smiling Mind resources. These resources will be used to enhance Mindfulness, and in turn, Resilience at our College. We look forward to seeing the results of this positive initiative.

MINDFULNESS

As an advocate for positive education, Altona P-9 is always looking at researched-based best practice techniques to support our existing programs. This week, I had the pleasure of representing Altona P-9 at a Mindfulness Workshop. It became obvious throughout the workshop, that the mindfulness techniques presented had applications with and beyond classrooms. Included in this newsletter is an article outlining the benefits of mindfulness techniques and their role in combating anxiety and depression.

BREAKFAST CLUB

Breakfast Club continues to prove popular during our winter months. As a ‘thank-you’ to our dads, our Fathers’ Day Breakfast Club will be held on Thursday 4th September. This breakfast will be held from at 8:15-8:45am. The BBQ will once again be put to good use as we provide our dads with a warm breakfast of bacon and egg sandwiches. The main ingredients will be cooked separately to allow for dietary requirements. Students will be able to access their regular breakfast provisions. To ensure this event runs smoothly, I will be looking for helpers to assist in the set-up, cooking and serving at our Fathers’ Day Breakfast. Please contact me if you are able to assist.

I am also hoping that there may be two volunteers who could pack up Breakfast Club on Thursday 14th August. Both Jayne Altermatt and I will be involved in a meeting from 8:30am on this day and would be very grateful for assistance in the pack of Breakfast Club on the 14th August.

Stay warm,
Mrs Amanda Elmer
Do you:

- Have a child starting Prep in 2015?
- Want to give them the best start to school?
- Want to be confident that they are school literacy ready?

If so, contact us @ Altona P-9 College to sign up for our free pre-prep program. Starting August 7th and running each Thursday morning from 9-11am for the duration of Term 3 & 4. Places are limited so act now.

CONTACT US:
ph: 9250 8050
@: altona.p9@edumail.vic.gov.au
www: altonap9college.vic.edu.au
ITALIAN NEWS

BUONGIORNO TUTTI!

The term is progressing, with our Year One students in the process of developing a ‘hybrid’ play based on The Little Red Hen and The Giant Turnip. We’ve planned the story and assigned roles, so now it’s time to learn some language! The students’ efforts will culminate in a short film, so stay tuned for a film premiere in fourth term!

Last week, the Preps celebrated the first birthday of their Italian class bear, Giulia. They learnt to sing Tanti Auguri and were immersed in the sounds of Italian songs too. They’re having a great time and would love some parental participation in their classes. (We welcome visitors and no visit is too short!)

Years Five and Six are working on fashion this term and, with a lot more work, will be putting on a fashion show. The name of the show is ‘Recycled Spring 2014’ and the aim is to find, recycle and use items they already have; there should be NO COST to families, so beware of children asking for new clothes!

Please remember to visit our Italian blog and discuss what you’re children are doing at school. Information about the junior curricula can be found at our blog, whilst the students in Years Five to Eight know to check their Edmodo for information. (Parents are also able to get their own Edmodo login on request, so feel free to email me for your parent code.) Listed below are both links:

http://italianatACP9.global2.vic.edu.au
www.edmodo.com

Here are our latest Italian Words of the Week:

prego – you’re welcome
ci vediamo – see you

Grazie mille,
Simona Costello
Italian Teacher
MUSIC NEWS

Students from the College's Choir will be attending the third annual 'Festival of Performing Arts' at Jamieson Way School, Carranballac College: on Wednesday 27th August. We are excited to be involved in this year's festival and are currently working on a song titled "What are we waiting for?" Our students will be performing in the 1pm show and entry is free. You are most welcome to attend. This event showcases the talents of students from Hobsons Bay and Wyndham within a supportive and student-friendly environment. There will be a large stage, quality audio equipment, lighting and huge video projectors to highlight the performances. There is no charge for participation, or entry.

If your child is in choir, could all permission slips be returned to the office as soon as possible. Thank you Jayson Cooper

CHESS CLUB

Chess club is now up and running. Chess is an excellent way to develop students strategic thinking skills. Already there is great determination to get to the top of the ladder! All students from Year 3 onwards are welcome. We have a couple of State champions to help teach us all some new tactics and improve our skills! Meets Monday lunchtime. See Mrs. Taylor for details.

FROM THE KITCHEN GARDEN

I want to say a big hello to everyone in the Altona P-9 College community and introduce myself as the new Garden Specialist. My name is Carolina Cordeiro and I am a very keen gardener. I work as the Garden Specialist at Altona Green Primary School and also run my own market garden business in Central Victoria. I love growing vegetables, herbs, fruit and flowers.

Here at Altona P-9 College, I will be working with the Prep to Grade 6 students in our new garden, growing and harvesting delicious produce that students will then cook and eat in the kitchen with Cathie. There are many opportunities to get involved in the garden and kitchen, the program timetable is available from the office if you would like to volunteer. I will be in on Mondays, so please feel free to come up and introduce yourself, I'm really looking forward to meeting all the students, parents and anyone else who is interested in the garden.

Ms Carolina Cordeiro
Kitchen Garden Specialist
CARRANBALLAC P-9 COLLEGE is proud to host the 26th Annual Festival of Performing Arts.
4 shows over 2 days, 10.30am & 1pm.
This event showcases the talent of students from schools in Hobsons Bay and Wyndham.
- Large stage
- Quality sound and video
- No charge for participation
Friends and family are welcome. Entry is free.
FUNDRAISING NEWS

CAKE STALL

Recently I’ve had the pleasure of spending some time with our gorgeous year 7 girls. After seeing the piles of Altona West Primary School uniform, that obviously can no longer be used, in my office we decided we should give it to some kids who might need it. Last year I was fortunate enough to attend a friend’s wedding in India where I met an amazing young woman who helps run a care centre for children in a city slum area. When I got in touch with her she said her students would be very proud to wear a uniform. So for a Positive Education Project the girls decided to organise a cake stall to raise funds to post the uniform to India.

Feel For A Fellow Foundation is a non-profit, Government registered organization working with the poorest of the poor in Hyderabad, India. The Foundation started their work in 2009, with 5 destitute children but now have 60 children attend their centre each day. Without the opportunity to attend the centre these children would collect waste, iron scrap, plastic waste, empty bottles, paper, rags to sell to scrap vendors so they could have money for food. Young girls are not encouraged to attend schools but are expected to help their mothers with domestic chores. Over the years the centre has become a remedial education Centre for children who’s parents cannot afford to send them to school and for young girls. The centre also provides meals for the children and after hours homework club as the students don’t have electricity at home.

Research has shown that when we give to others it activates the areas of the brain associated with pleasure, social connection and trust. Recent research into brain functioning has confirmed that we are hard-wired for love and compassion. So it’s not all chasing about individual success - our communities and society flourish when people look out for each other. Doing kind things for strangers helps build co-operation, trust and a sense of safety in our communities. It also helps us to see others more positively and empathise with them. These are the foundations of a thriving local community and a flourishing society - one which builds well-being all round. ([http://www.actionforhappiness.org/take-action/do-kind-things-for-others](http://www.actionforhappiness.org/take-action/do-kind-things-for-others))

I’m sure you’d agree that a co-operative, trusting, safe flourishing school community is one you’d love to be part of. So let’s all send some spare change to school on Wed 20th Aug to support our year 7 girls cake stall, encourage and connect with some Indian slum kids, and contribute to our flourishing school community.

Fundraising Cake Stall
Wed 20th August @ Recess Outside the canteen.
$1 cookies, honey joys and slice
$2 cupcakes.

Take Care,
Cathie Staunton
Chaplain.

SCHOOL BANKING

Altona P-9 College is having an account opening session which is locked in for Wednesday 20th August. It will be located in the office foyer between 8:30 and 9:45.
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<td>Rockband Afterschool Irrigation Workshop</td>
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<td>Science Week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rockband Afterschool Prep-4 Rugby Program</td>
<td>Year 7-9 Girls Go For I.T Excursion</td>
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<td>Diabetes Awareness Day</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Rockband Afterschool Prep-4 Rugby Program</td>
<td>Bank Account Opening Session 8:30-9:45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rockband Afterschool</td>
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<td>Year 1-6 FOPA Excursion</td>
<td>School Disco Evening</td>
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## 2014 Lunch Menu for Altona P-9 College

Place your order, at the school, or come by at Just Sweets (26 Upton Street, Altona). On this form, clearly state your child’s name, grade/class and tick (✓) the appropriate boxes to make your selection. Please provide correct cash. You may supply your own paper bag, or we can provide one for you at the cost of 20 cents at the office or at Just Sweets. Unfortunately, we cannot accept any responsibility for lost change.

### Name: ___________________________  Grade/Class: _______________________

### SANDWICHES: WHITE OR WHOLEMEAL BREAD - Made Fresh Daily!

**PLEASE NOTE:** All Sandwiches are spread with Cholesterol-Free Margarine. We can supply “Additional” fillings on any Sandwich: i.e. Lettuce, Cucumber, Carrot, Beetroot, Light Cheese and Tomato, at the cost of 40 cents extra per item. Circle preference.

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<tr>
<th>Item:</th>
<th>Price</th>
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<th>Price</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vegemite</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ham &amp; Cheese</td>
<td>$3.50</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Vegemite &amp; Cheese</td>
<td>$2.40</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ham, Cheese &amp; Tomato</td>
<td>$3.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ham &amp; Tomato</td>
<td>$3.50</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ham, Cheese &amp; Lettuce</td>
<td>$3.90</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cheese Lettuce, Cucumber &amp; Tomato</td>
<td>$3.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cheese</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cheese &amp; Tomato</td>
<td>$2.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vegemite Scroll</td>
<td>$2.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cheese Scroll</td>
<td>$2.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cheese &amp; Bacon Roll</td>
<td>$2.50</td>
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### HOT FOOD

**PLEASE NOTE:** Tomato Sauces will cost 20 cents extra.

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<th>Item:</th>
<th>Price</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large Beef Pie</td>
<td>$4.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hot Dog Skinless 10 inch Roll</td>
<td>$2.80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Large Sausage Roll</td>
<td>$3.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>Baked Chicken Breast Nuggets each</td>
<td>$0.70</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baked Lasagne Beef Bolognese - 500g</td>
<td>$6.50</td>
<td></td>
<td>Baked Chicken Breast Nuggets x3 pieces</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nachos (i.e. Corn Chips, Tomato Salsa Sauce, Sour Cream &amp; Shredded Cheese)</td>
<td>$5.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>Steamed Dim Sim</td>
<td>$1.00</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Baked Traditional Beef Lasagne (97% Fat Free) - 200g</td>
<td>$4.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>Steamed Dim Sim x3</td>
<td>$2.50</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Noodles - Beef</td>
<td>$2.50</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Noodles - Chicken</td>
<td>$2.50</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Baked Macaroni &amp; Cheese (97% Fat Free) - 200g</td>
<td>$4.00</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Baked Spaghetti Bolognese - 200g</td>
<td>$4.00</td>
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### SNACKS & COLD DRINKS

**PLEASE NOTE:** If an item is “unavailable”, then a substitute will be given.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Smart Milk - Strawberry - 250ml</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>LOL - 250ml Apple, Pineapple &amp; Passionfruit</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Smart Milk - Chocolate - 250ml</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>LOL - 250ml Apple &amp; Mandarin</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Smartie Cookie</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>LOL - 250ml Apple &amp; Strawberry</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chocolate Smartie Cookie</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>LOL - 250ml Blackcurrent</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Streets Calippo - Raspberry</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>LOL - 250ml Apple &amp; Raspberry</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Streets Calippo - Pineapple &amp; Original Lemon</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
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<td>Just Juice - Apple - 200ml</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Just Juice - Apple &amp; Blackcurrant - 200ml</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
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<td>Just Juice - Orange - 200ml</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bottled Water - 600ml</td>
<td>$1.50</td>
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### REQUIREMENTS

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<th>Item:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Paper Bag</td>
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<td>Fresh Long Roll</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seasoning Salt</td>
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<td>Seasoning Black Pepper</td>
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<td>Bread White</td>
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<td>Bread Wholmeal</td>
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Tick ✓ if required.
Dear Parent/Carers,

We would like to introduce you to a new initiative offering Dental Services to schools. It is called Cohealth and offers services at its community centre providing quality dental care to children from birth to age 17. Emergency and general care is provided, for eligible families.

For 0-12 years olds
- The service is free for all children

For 13-17 year olds
- You are eligible to use this service if you
  o are a holder or a dependant of someone with a concession card
  or
  o you are eligible for the Child Dental Health Benefits Schedule.
- For eligible children it is free

The Child Dental Benefits Schedule means you are eligible to have free dental care at Western Region Health Centre
- No out of pocket cost
- No $1000 limit

Treatment is provided at;

2 Geelong Road, Footscray (Corner of Geelong and Ballarat Roads)

To make an appointment call 8398 4100

They will also offer dental checks at our school. We will organise to be a part of the school visit program if there is sufficient interest and will inform you of the date asap.

If you are interested please complete and return the attached form to the office by close of day Monday 4th. August 2014.

Kind regards,

Julie Krause
PRINCIPAL
Counting Smiles Initiative

Counting Smiles Registration/ PARENT CONSENT Form

The Counting Smiles Initiative is an oral health screening designed to identify children who have oral health care needs. It is recommended that all children still receive a dental check up with a dental practitioner within 12 months.

I, ____________________________________________________ parent /Guardian of

(Childs name) ___________________________________________ Male / Female

Hereby AGREE/DO NOT AGREE

to participate in the Counting Smiles Initiative for the purpose of having an oral health screen for my child.

I understand there will be no x-rays taken and my child will only be screened if he/she is happy to do so.

The staff will use proper Infection Control standards.

I understand that I will receive a brief report as to the condition of my child’s oral health.

I will probably follow up my child’s Dental Care by taking my child for ongoing care to:

☐ My own private dentist OR

☐ Cohealth (formerly Western Region Health Centre), 2 Geelong Rd, Footscray OR

☐ Another public dental clinic

SIGNED ____________________________________________

DATE ________/ ________/ ________

Please complete the section below if you would like your child to participate

CHILD’S NAME: ____________________________________________

DATE OF BIRTH: ________/ ________/ ________

ADDRESS: ________________________________________________

SUBURB: ______________________________________ POSTCODE: ____________

TELEPHONE: (H) ___________________________ Mobile: ___________________________

HOME LANGUAGE: ____________________________

COUNTRY OF BIRTH: ____________________________

INDIGENOUS STATUS: ABORIGINAL ☐ TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ☐ NEITHER ☐
Welcome back to Camp Australia for term 3. We have been back a few weeks now. Over the past weeks we have had loads of fun doing marble painting. Everyone did a painting.

The kids have been really enjoying the new playground equipment and there is plenty of space for them all to get on together after school.

We made a large lime Gummy Bear. Thanks to the Vandenberg for the idea and the recipe.

Any ideas you may have for including in our program are very welcome. Please let us know what these are.

We are talking with the school about composting our food waste and our Buddy program for preventing bullying is about to get started. More details later. Do come and visit us to see what we do.

Natalie MacLachlan, Coordinator

Once registered
You can make bookings and cancellations, view your statements and manage your details anytime of the day.

Save on Care
Save 50% or more on Before and After School Care with the Child Care Rebate. Almost all families are eligible. To find out more call our Customer Service Team on 1300 105 343

Holiday Clubs
Don't forget about the Camp Australia Holiday Clubs these school holidays. Use the Holiday Club Finder on the website to find the nearest program: www.campaustralia.com.au/holidayclubs

Healthy Snacks
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Mindfulness, the most scientifically investigated form of meditation, has been the subject of a huge growth of interest in clinical and scientific circles in recent years. The evidence is suggesting that learning to pay attention may be the most important skill we ever learn. Why? What are the health benefits of meditation? How are modern scientific methods being used to investigate meditation and its benefits? These and other questions will be explored in this introductory article.

The importance of paying attention is not a new concept as this quote from William James, the father of modern psychology, indicates.

“The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character, and will. No one is com pass sui (competent) if he have it not. An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence.”

Mindfulness, in its simplest and most universal sense, is a mental discipline that involves training attention. It teaches us how to use the mind in a different way and to focus on the things that are most useful and helpful in our lives thus helping us to live more consciously and fully.

The importance of attention and the cost of inattention

Which of the following was associated with greatest self-reported happiness?
- Mind wandering to neutral topics
- Mind wandering to pleasant topics
- Mind not wandering from what one is currently doing

You might feel tempted to answer that we are happiest when the mind is wandering to pleasant topics. In fact, according to a study from Harvard University, people report being happiest while their mind is not wandering from what they are doing.

The authors of this study wrote,

“In conclusion, a human mind is a wandering mind, and a wandering mind is an unhappy mind. The ability to think about what is not happening is a cognitive achievement that comes at an emotional cost.”

Why would that be?
A study into the effect of mobile phone use on the chance of having a Motor Vehicle Accident (MVA) found that within 5 minutes of using a mobile phone the risk of a motor vehicle accident is over 400% higher; that is, we are more than four times as likely to have an MVA.3

These two studies highlight some of the issues about inattention and the loss of focus associated with multitasking. Firstly, when our mind is wandering we are not paying attention to what we are doing. This results in more mistakes, less efficiency, and less enjoyment. Secondly, what is the mind doing when we are not paying attention? Well, we might be wishing to experience happiness resulting from the imagination, but this only gives us a superficial experience of the life we are actually leading and never leads to a stable and deeply satisfying level of wellbeing. In fact, the constant desire to be somewhere else (some other place or time) can produce a slowly growing sense of dissatisfaction with where we are here and now. Furthermore, when we are not paying attention is the time when the mind gets up to “mischief” in the form of worry and rumination which are at the very heart of anxiety and depression.

**Mindfulness and the ‘fight-or-flight’ response**

When we are not paying attention we often make mountains out of mole-hills and perceive stressors that don’t even exist, except in our imaginations that is. This amplifies our level of stress enormously which takes a toll on our mental and physical health.

The “fight or flight response” is a natural, necessary and appropriate response to a threatening situation if it is based on a clearly perceived actual, real-time, threat – say confronting a person-eating tiger. This turbo-charge of energy is coded into our systems by nature in order to preserve life. It is associated with:

- Increased blood flow: dynamic circulation
- Elevation of blood-pressure, heart rate
- Diversion of blood-flow to the muscles and away from gut and skin (going pale)
- Increased metabolism
- Increased metabolic rate
- Increased respiration and opening up of airways
- Mobilisation of energy (glucose and fat stores)
- Armed defences
- Blood gets thicker (platelet adhesiveness) to stop bleeding faster
- Mobilises immune cells

**Preparation for tissue repair**
- Mobilising inflammatory hormones (e.g. cortisol, cytokines, interleukins etc) to help repair tissues damaged while dealing with the threat
- Attention centres in the brain activated

The “fight or flight response” is appropriate in life protecting providing, it is only turned on when it needs to be, it is allowed to turn off when it is no longer needed and it is not prolonged. When appropriate we do not experience fight or flight so much as anxiety but rather as a surge of energy, like a turbo charger. When we activate it inappropriately on the other hand we experience it as anxiety as all these chemicals and changes are being switched on with nowhere to go.

When we get anxious about things that haven’t happened yet, or have already come and gone, then we activate the system inappropriately and this takes its toll over time. The results of worrying about what has not happened is the main reason why there are more heart attacks on Monday mornings prior to work than at any other time in the week.4

The name given to the long-term over-activation of the stress response is allostatic load.5 It is like a physiological wear and tear on the body and is seen in chronic depression and anxiety. High allostatic load, among other things, leads to:
- Immune dysregulation (lowered defences against infections but increased inflammation)
- Hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis) which leads to cardiovascular disease
- Metabolic syndrome (high blood pressure, high blood lipids, high blood glucose and putting on weight around the trunk)
- Thinning of the bones (osteoporosis)
- Loss of brain cells (accelerated ageing or atrophy) particularly in the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex (learning, memory and executive functioning areas of the brain) which predisposes to Alzheimer’s Disease in later life
- Growth of the amygdala (the fear and stress centre of the brain)

If we wanted to accelerate the ageing process then this is a great way to do it. The good news is that these effects can all be reversed over time with the regular practice of meditation which starts to help us understand how it is that meditation has such widespread health benefits. The focusing of attention on the here and now helps us to see which stressors are actually present and which ones are only in our imagination.

**Applications of mindfulness**

The list of applications of mindfulness / meditation for healthcare and personal development keep growing year upon year.6 The research into preventing relapse in depression has probably caused more interest than any other single application. Some of the benefits of mindfulness-based meditation are listed below and some of these will be described in more detail later.

- Mental health
  - E.g. depression relapse prevention, anxiety, panic disorder, stress, emotional regulation, addiction, sleep
- Neuroscience
  - E.g. structural and functional changes in the brain, generation of new brain cells (neurogenesis) in particular in the memory and executive functioning centres, dementia prevention.
Reduced activity in the amygdala
- Clinical
  - E.g. pain management, symptom control, coping with major illnesses like cancer, reduced allostatic load and metabolic benefits, hormonal changes, improved genetic function and repair and possibly slower ageing
- Improved performance
  - E.g. sport, academic, leadership
- Spiritual
  - E.g. deep peace, insight, oneness, transcendence

Academic Performance
We know from experience that when we are distracted, stressed, depressed or anxious we function far less effectively. This is because the regions of the brain that gather and process information are working poorly at such times. It is primarily a problem with attention, but we don’t have to be stressed to notice that much of the time we are not focused on the things we need to be focused on. For example, sitting in a lecture and the mind is out the door, or studying at the desk and the attention is out the window. Learning mindfulness not only helps us to function better under pressure but also helps us to utilise our time better, to focus, and to foster a growth mindset which is more conducive to learning.

Neuroplasticity

“Neurons that fire together, wire together.”
Hebb’s hypothesis
For better or for worse, how we consistently think and behave will ‘wire’ itself into the brain. We now understand that the brain is constantly rewiring itself right throughout our lives. From a therapeutic perspective, it also means that we can ‘unwire’ unhelpful patterns of thought and behaviour and wire in helpful ones. This has significant implications for the development and management of anxiety and depression. Meditation research is literally changing the way we understand the brain. The Mind and Life Institute is a collaboration of top scientists engaged in research in this field and the book ‘The Brain that Changes Itself’ by Norman Doig gives a great overview for those who are interested to read further on this topic.

Brain scans measuring the thickness of the ‘grey matter’ in long-term mindfulness meditators indicates that it is thicker particularly in the areas associated with the senses, memory and executive functioning. This may be slowing down the ageing of the brain and reversing the negative effects of long term stress and depression.

Default mental activity
There are two main modes of brain activity.
1. Active tasks: tasks associated with paying attention
2. Default state: when mind is inattentive, idle, recalling past, daydreaming, ruminating ...

Interestingly, brain regions active in ‘default states’ in young adults also show the early changes found in the elderly with Alzheimer’s Disease (AD). The reason is not known but it may have to do with wear and tear on the brain through too much default activity, or we may be practicing inattention, or perhaps it relates to the stressfull effects of going over the past almost constantly. We do know that inattention is not healthy for the brain – it is like physical inactivity for the body.

Having leisure activities where we don’t pay attention (principally watching television) also seems to be associated with an unhealthy brain and a lifelong risk of AD. According to one of a number of studies, those who have less than average diversity in leisure activities, spend less time on them, and practice more passive leisure activities (principally TV) were nearly four times as likely to develop dementia over 40-year follow-up compared to those who rate higher than average on these parameters. Among leisure activities, reading, playing board games, playing musical instruments, and dancing were associated with a reduced risk of dementia.

A high level of default mental activity is associated with poorer mental health such as depression and anxiety. In people who are trained in mindfulness meditation however it has been found that the level of default mental activity is reduced. Even when default mental activity is present the areas of the brain involved with self-monitoring are also active, meaning that the person is aware of this mental activity and is able to be more objective about it and not be so drawn into it.

Training attention
Attention, like any other skill, can be trained. When we first start formal meditation practice we tend to find that we are on automatic pilot much of the time and are unaware of moment-to-moment experience. Development of attention is gradual, progressive and requires regular practice. Impatience for progress is a distraction and an impediment to progress in itself, so it’s best to be patient and gentle on ourselves and allow benefits to come in their own time. The benefits do not come without effort – unhelpful habits on the other hand do not take any effort to reinforce.

Mindfulness is a mental discipline involving training attention. It is not a method of distracting ourselves or tuning out, it is about tuning in – hence people perform better when they are more mindful, sometimes called ‘the zone’ or a ‘flow state’. The anxious, stressed or depressed state of mind is the distracted state, hence the negative impact upon performance. It is not primarily a relaxation exercise although relaxation is a common “side-effect”.

Mindfulness and depression
Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) was developed by some prominent psychologists from the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn. Mindfulness is more than just having a time out from worry for a few minutes a couple of times a day. It is a way of teaching us to use the mind in a different way and to live more consciously. MBCT more than halves the relapse rate for people who have had depression in the past 76% to 36%.

MBCT reduces relapse by changing relationships to negative thoughts and emotions (non-attachment to them) rather than by changing belief in thought content as is the case with conventional cognitive therapy. In a sense, we don’t have to control negative thoughts and emotions, but we don’t have to be controlled by them either.

Mindfulness not only reduces depressive symptoms but it also reduces the reactivity of the amygdala this seems to be very overactive in people with depression.

In adolescents, mindfulness reduced symptoms of anxiety, depression, and somatic distress, and increased self-esteem and sleep quality.

Mindfulness has also been found to enhance doctors’ wellbeing, and reduce mood disturbance and burnout (the three hallmarks of burnout being emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a lack of personal accomplishment). It also increased empathy, responsiveness to their patients, greater conscientiousness and more emotional stability.

Meditation and ageing
Work by the team led by Australia’s Nobel Prize winning researcher, Elizabeth Blackburn, has found that meditation may slow genetic ageing and enhance genetic repair. If one considers all of the affects of allostatic load mentioned before, it is probably not surprising that something such as meditation would help to slow and possibly even reverse to some extent the ageing process.
Mindfulness and craving

Meditation can be very helpful in making healthy lifestyle changes. Stopping smoking, for example, is not easy and one has to learn to deal with cravings. The normal way is to suppress them but this comes at a cost as far as our mental health is concerned. A study looked at the effectiveness of suppression compared to mindfulness for coping with cigarette cravings. Both groups reported a significantly reduced amount of smoking and increased effectiveness in coping with smoking urges but only participants in the mindfulness group demonstrated reductions in negative affect (mood) and depressive symptoms.26

Mindfulness and cancer patients

Where cancer patients learn mindfulness in their cancer management, they were found to have significantly lower scores for low mood, depression, anxiety, anger, and confusion but they also had more vigour with fewer overall physical and stress symptoms.27 Mindfulness has also been shown to reduce cortisol levels in cancer patients – a sign of a poor prognosis – and improve quality of life.28

Meditation and compassion

The ability to feel compassion and empathy are increased by mindfulness as well as reducing ‘cancer fatigue’ or ‘cancer burnout’.29 This really should make sense when one considers that paying more attention to who is in front of us will help us to be in touch with them and what is going on for them. Compassion may be a natural side-effect of attention and a lack of compassion a side-effect of inattention.

Chronic pain

Mindfulness meditation has been found to be associated with a significant reduction in pain, fatigue, and sleeplessness, but improved functioning, mood and general health for people with chronic pain syndromes.30,31,32

Mindfulness and eating disorders

Mindfulness looks to be a promising approach for helping in the management of binge-eating disorders. It possibly does this by increasing awareness of the behaviour and physical cues, helping to deal with self-criticism and negative self-image and assisting with managing eating impulses and difficult emotions.33

Meditation and sleep

Although meditation is about cultivating restful awareness it can help to significantly improve sleep – i.e. better sleep quality, being able to go to sleep more easily, a longer sleep duration and less use of sleep medications34 which may be responsible for also reducing depression in those with chronic insomnia.35

Meditation and immunity

Among cancer patients, the significant improvements seen in overall quality of life, symptoms of stress, and sleep quality are associated with improvements in immunity with lower levels of the inflammatory hormones which can accelerate cancer growth.36 People also show better immune response to vaccinations and increases in antibodies.37

Meditation and control

Feeling out of control is one of the most unpleasant aspects of having a major illness. We cannot always control the things happening to us, but we can have more control of ourselves in choosing our response these events and our attitude to them. Put another way, it helps us to have a more adaptive and less avoidant coping style.38,39

Cultivating mindfulness

No sooner do we start formally practicing mindfulness meditation than we may discover that we have been largely unaware of the nature, extent and effect of mental activity in our minds. It tends to make itself obvious when we try to concentrate but notice that unconsciously our attention is almost constantly being taken away. This distracted or unmindful state of mind has a number of effects particularly on performance and enjoyment.

1. Wasting time through lack of focus
2. Inefficiency and increased errors
3. Poor communication
4. Lack of engagement and enjoyment of life
5. Misreading what is taking place around us

But what is the mind up to when we are not paying attention? Whether we call it worry or rumination or daydreaming, much of this incessant ‘thinking’ is behind many of our anxieties, negativity, anger and fears and unless we become aware of its presence and effect we have no choice about whether to engage in it or not. To be free of it we must first be aware of it, detached from it, consciously examine it and let go of what is irrelevant. To be free of it we must first be aware of it, detached from it, consciously examine it and let go of what is irrelevant.

Mindfulness is more than learning to pay attention – it also implies cultivating an attitude of openness, interest and acceptance. One trick is that when we fight with the thoughts and feelings we would rather not be having we actually feed them with more attention and increase the impact that they have. So learning to notice them and be non-reactive and non-judgmental of them is an important aspect of learning to be free of them.

Most meditative techniques rely on the attention being focussed restfully; hence the term ‘restful alertness.’ In order to do this one need not struggle with the distracting stream of circular, habitual, repetitive and imaginary mental activity. One cannot stop the mind from thinking and any attempt to do so generally leads to heightened tension and frustration. We can, however, learn not to be so reactive to it. This takes the emotive force out of it. Analogously, many trains of thought come into our minds but we can learn not to be moved by them not by trying to stop them or fight with them, but by learning that we don’t need to get on board any old train of thought that comes into our minds. That takes a lot of awareness.

What we give our attention to is important because we give the power to whatever the attention is directed to. In giving attention to fearful, anxious, angry or depressing thoughts we almost ‘mediate’ upon them progressively making them more ‘real’ and compelling. When we take such imaginings and mental projections to be real they govern our lives, behaviour and responses to events and, over time, they can change the brain’s chemistry, set up a cascade of events throughout the body, and accelerate illness. Obviously one cannot ‘mediate our problems away’. Mindfulness is therefore not a method of tuning out but rather tuning in. It is not a method of distraction but rather a method of engagement. It is the stressed, anxious, angry and depressed state of mind that is the distracted state – mindfulness is the remedy.

Therefore, if we are interested in results then we should first be interested in paying attention. If we are interested in the best results then we should also practice being so present with the process that we cease to be anxious about the outcome.
This is the zone and it is when we are most happy, effective and mindful.

Formal mindfulness practice

A day is just like a book. If it isn't punctuated it becomes a blur and makes little sense. These 'punctuation marks' are times of consciously coming to rest so that we can remind ourselves to be present and pay attention. For this reason the two following practices are suggested. The 'full stop' could be practiced anything from 5 to 30 minutes twice a day depending on motivation and opportunity, and the 'comma' for 15 seconds to 2 minutes as often as you remember throughout the day. The comma is particularly useful between having completed one activity and beginning another.

Conclusion

In summary, what meditation can teach us may have tremendously useful effects on our physical and psychological wellbeing because it:
1. Improves how effectively we function
2. Has direct benefits by changing the body physically and metabolically
3. Has indirect benefits by improving our lifestyle
4. Enhances relationships and compassion
5. Improves the way we cope with life challenges
6. Enriches our enjoyment of life

Further reading

- Full Catastrophe Living: Kabat-Zinn
- Meditation, Pure and Simple: Gawler
- Mindfulness-Based CBT: Segal et al
- Know Thyself: Hassed
- The Essence of Health: Hassed
- The Mindful Way Through Depression: Williams et al
- The Mindful Brain: Siegal
- The Brain that Changes Itself: Doidge

Exercise 1 - “The full stop”

Sit the body in a chair so that the spine is upright and balanced but relaxed. Have the body symmetrical and allow the eyes to gently close.

Now, move the attention gently through each step. Be conscious of the body and its connection with the chair. Feel the feet on the floor. Notice if the feet are tense. If so allow them to relax if they want to. Similarly, be aware of the legs and allow them to relax if they wish, and so gently move up through each part of the body; the stomach, hands, arms, shoulders, neck and face. If tension or discomfort remains, just notice the presence of tension or discomfort without judgment.

Now take in a deep breath and slowly and gently let the breath out. Repeat this twice more then just allow the breathing to settle into its own natural rhythm without having to control it in any way. If you observe a tendency to try and control the breathing, just impartially notice that. Simply be conscious of the breath as the air flows in and out of the nose. If thoughts come to your awareness allow them to come and go without judgment and let the attention return to the breathing. There is no need to struggle with the activity of the mind, nor even wish that it wasn’t there. Like ‘trains of thought’, just let them come and go.

After a time, let the attention move to the listening. Hear whatever sounds there are to hear without having to analyse the sounds. Once again, if thoughts come let them pass. If the mind becomes distracted, for example by listening to some mental commentary or chatter, simply notice and return to the sounds as a gentle way of returning to the present moment.

At the end of this exercise simply be aware of the body again and then slowly allow the eyes to open. After a few moments quietly move into whatever activities await you.

Exercise 2 - “The comma”

This exercise can take anywhere from a few seconds to a couple of minutes. It is a short punctuation in a busy day between finishing one activity and starting another, for example before starting the car, beginning a meal, before an interview, or between patients. It helps to “clean the slate” making us fresher for the next activity.

The steps and principles are the same as above but just much shorter. Be aware of the body and allow the posture to be balanced and relaxed but upright. Let the body relax generally by taking one or two deep breaths and breathing the tension out. Let the breath settle and allow the attention to rest with it. Then be aware of the environment and the sounds in it as they come and go. Do not prolong the comma past what is appropriate for that moment, then move quietly into whatever awaits you.

If you are in a busy office and it would be conspicuous to close your eyes just keep them open but rest them on a point as you practice.
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