

'Mindfulness and meditation rid me of anxiety'

BEING born in Zimbabwe and growing up in Johannesburg, Carolynne Bennett says that there was always a lot of fear around in her childhood. She was an anxious child, and her anxiety only got worse as she grew up.

"It got to the point where I was struggling to sit round the table for meetings at work," says the 42-year-old from Curdridge.

"It was getting worse and worse. I started to struggle to take my daughter to school or go to the supermarket. I would feel dizzy and had a fear of fainting. I'd have cold sweats and a deep sense of fear and dread. I used to panic about panicking."

Carolynne didn't find medication helpful and feared that she would

Sally Churchward



spend the rest of her life suffering from chronic anxiety.

Then, in 2015, she developed auto-immune disease and her anxiety symptoms got even worse.

"I felt desperate," she says. "I felt like I was going to be stuck with anxiety forever. It was always underlying but there would be periods when it would be really heightened, and it had been that way since I was a teenager."

Carolynne knew she needed to do something to help herself, and began studying meditation and mindfulness, going on to become a meditation and mindfulness instructor.

It has changed her life.

"My anxiety is pretty much non-existent now," says Carolynne, who is also a life coach.

"My mind was constantly feeding my anxiety with 'what ifs', worrying about what could go wrong. Your body becomes very sensitive, constantly looking for threats and danger."

"I began the process of quieting my mind, and noticed I was getting fewer anxiety attacks."

Carolynne says that she began noticing some changes quite

quickly, which gave her faith in the process, and that it took four to five months for a significant reduction in her anxiety attacks.

"I started with things like basic breathing techniques, which I still do," she says.

"I set my alarm and spend five minutes focusing on my breath. If my mind wanders, I take it back to my breath. I just concentrate on the in and out. If my mind wanders, that's OK, but I bring it back to my breath."

"I also started doing basic mindfulness. Things like focusing on what I could hear - birds, cars, etc, and then switching to all the colours I could see. It's about being in the present. Anxiety is about living in the future. As I did the mindfulness and meditations, my nervous system began to reset itself to a normal level, rather than being in flight of fight mode."

Meditation and mindfulness have become a way of life for Carolynne.

"I meditate on most days, even if it's just for five minutes, although often it's longer," she says.

"With mindfulness it's something I can do almost all the time, for instance when I'm washing up. I do as much as I can throughout the day. I do my best to be as present as I can. It's how I keep a handle on my anxiety."

Carolynne adds that she doesn't



Abuse survivor's charity fundraiser

A DOMESTIC abuse survivor who now owns her own pub is holding a family fundraising day to help give back to one of the organisations that helped her.

Tara Jepson is holding a family-friendly music festival, Yacht, Stock and Barrel, at the Yacht Tavern in Woolston on August 4 to raise money for Women's Aid.

The event will include a number

children go free.

Tara said that it was important for her to give back to an organisation that helped her when she needed it.

"Women's Aid gave me my freedom back," she said.

"They gave me a new life that I didn't think I was going to have again. It's hugely important for domestic abuse survivors to speak out," she added.



Carolynne grew up in Johannesburg

know if she would have been prepared to try meditation and mindfulness earlier in her life.

"I'm not sure that I would have been open to it when I was younger," she says.

"I'm pleased I discovered it when I did, I was ready for it and

to be serious about my meditation practice. Now it's become a solid part of my daily routine, and it's helped me immensely."

Having discovered for herself how life changing mindfulness and meditation can be, Carolynne is keen to share the benefits with

Carolynne's top 5 tips on how to start meditation:

- Create a nice and calm space. This can be anywhere. If your household seems to be hectic, don't shy away from thinking outside the box. Use your car, your garden - anywhere that works for your everyday life.

- Chose a regular time to meditate every day. This means it becomes part of your routine. Make sure you tell your partner or family that you can't be interrupted, so choose a time this is possible.

- Sit in a comfortable position. Sitting up is best, as it avoids you falling asleep. Your body restores better if you are able to stay awake. Don't worry if you do - it's likely to happen to start with. You can lie down if you prefer, but make sure you're comfortable.

- Start with short meditation. Anything from around five to seven minutes. This makes it achievable and means your mind is less likely to wonder off and think of other things, as you're training yourself.

- Focus on the breath. Feel your breath as you inhale through your nose, into your mouth and into your lungs as deeply as you can. Then exhale. If your mind wanders - and it will - don't beat yourself up, but simply remember to focus on your breathing.

Cancer's not stopping runner Mel

SHE signed up for the Southampton Half Marathon to help raise funds for those with breast cancer. Two weeks later, Mel Woods, of Gosport, was diagnosed with breast cancer herself - but went on to take part in the race.

And September, Mel will be participating in the Winchester Half Marathon in support of Breast Cancer Haven, Wessex, which is part of a national charity which



sides," says Mel.

"Having been to the centre, it has a very warm, welcoming feel, and they truly embrace those who come in needing support."

"That's why I and a team of four from my daughter's nursery, Little Explorers Day Nursery, will be participating in the Winchester Half Marathon."

"My treatment is not yet complete, but fundraising and taking on challenges brings me



Jan Crispin with her...

How J... down of disa...

EIGHT years ago, paralysed from the chest down, Extensive treatment in her arms and p...

The Daily Echo she raised £5,000 Trust through a s...

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Jan give as muc for the organisat they do - importa day to keep the s...

And she has the "He comes ever I'm volunteering "He's a great ic a wheelchair can helps break down...

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Jan is keen to e doesn't mean she find different wa...

Recently she ev charity Aerobili "I'm always lo challenges," she

"It's all about opportunity to e "There are lots really clever, an you're disabled,

Jan adds that awareness of th