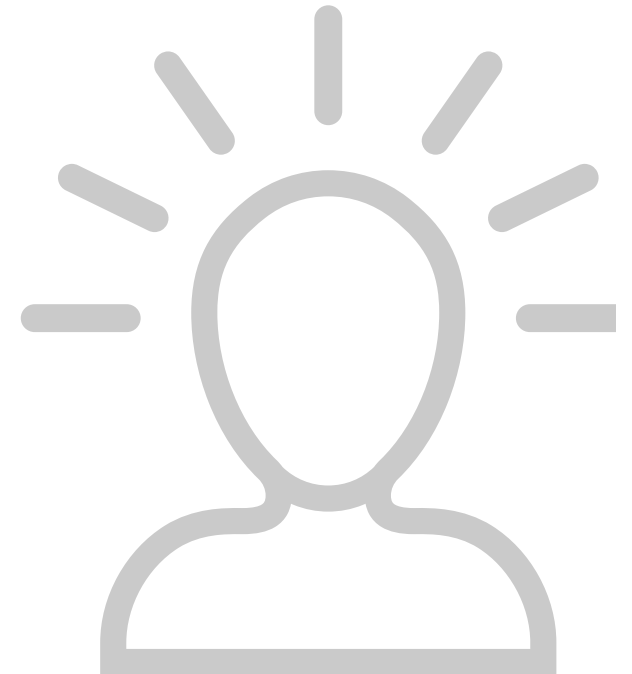


CHILL, GUYS

Learn how to **stay chill** when all those around you are hot and bothered with a quick primer on **mindfulness**. It's guaranteed to **make you level up your learning.**

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

The fight or flight response
The effects of cortisol
Breathing and its effects on mood and attention
Mindfulness and learning



Fight or flight, run away or be lunch.

Everyone gets tense sometimes. Some people get sweaty, some people get twitchy, some people get shouty. It's what happens when we get stressed. **But did you know there's a whole science behind stress?**

Smart scientists who study the human body tell us that what happens when we feel stressed is that we revert back to some biological mechanisms that have been with us since the first creatures wandered around eating stuff or running away to avoid being stuff that got eaten.

It's called **fight or flight**. Whether you were scrapping it out or running away, you needed stuff to happen in your body. You needed extra energy for your muscles. You needed to be aware of what's happening around you to avoid danger. You needed to do some roaring and baring your teeth. Or you needed to be able to run away very, very quickly. Either way around, be bad at it, and you were someone's dinner.

When you are in fight or flight mode, your body gets flooded with a chemical called **cortisol**. It's a very powerful chemical that **activates your brain** to be extra aware and **increases your heart rate** to get you ready to rumble.

The problem is that these days there are few occasions when you are likely to get eaten. Unless you have a tiger in your street. Which is pretty rare. The most that happens to us now is that someone is salty or our coffee order is wrong.

But your body, still operating on its ancient mechanisms, doesn't know the difference. Because you are built for fight or flight, you quickly enter fight or flight mode. And when you are **chronically stressed** - that's stress that is low-level and for a long period - your body continually releases cortisol.

You might think that's a good thing. **But you would be wrong.**

Cortisol has a lot of bad effects. It raises your blood pressure to pump more blood to help you to run, but high blood pressure can lead to a range of conditions, including strokes and heart failure. And over very long periods, cortisol can cause depression because it messes with the delicate chemicals in your brain.

No yoga, no Yoda.

So what can you do?

It's impossible to completely eliminate some of the things that cause us to be stressed (exams, for example). And a certain level of challenge is useful. Otherwise, you would sit in bed all day eating party pies and posting on Instagram.

What you can do is **manage your stress**. And in doing so lower your cortisol and reduce its harmful effects.

One way to do this is to **meditate**. Meditation is where you try and focus on one thing, sometimes by chanting a mantra, and tune out from what's around you. It's easier said than done and some people who live at the top of mountains practice for years to get it right.

Or you can do **yoga**. Get your mat, kit yourself out with some LuLu Lemon gear and get all stretchy.

AND BREATHE

But you don't have to do yoga or be all Yoda, to manage your stress. It turns out that the very best thing you can do is **to learn to breathe**.

Breathing is cool. While cortisol makes you breathe faster and shallower so you can fight or flight, **breathing slower reduces cortisol** and gets you back to a state of equal balance or **equilibrium**.

And the good news is you don't need to go to a yoga class or a Buddhist monastery to do it. You're going to do it right now. **Give it a try.**

Close your eyes and try breathing in for a count of 6. Then out for six. Do that 5 times.

You should feel just a little bit calmer. (If you are in fact not breathing at all you did it for a count of 50. This was a mistake. Do not do this.)

You can deep breathe anywhere - in class, at home, at the mall or watching tv - and you don't need to close your eyes at all.

Mindfulness.

But you can go further and practice what is called **mindfulness**. It's a **cross between meditation and deep breathing**. Kind of MeditationLite or BreathingPlus.

In mindfulness, you try and **clear your mind of thoughts and just breathe**.

People who teach mindfulness say that you can't get rid of **all** thoughts but when a thought comes into your head you have to try and **imagine that it's a cloud crossing the empty sky**. If you have a thought like ***I'm worried about that assignment*** you have to try and stop yourself doing any more worrying. Just let it drift by.

This is quite hard. You have to start small, with **a minute of mindfulness first** and work your way up to longer and longer.

Luckily the people who practice mindfulness **have some neat tricks to help you out**.

One is called **the body scan**. You're going to try that **right now**.

Sit in a chair and close your eyes. Breathe slowly. Now starting at your little toe, slowly focus on each part of your body, moving up until you get to the very top of your head.

You'll find that you have spent a long time thinking about nothing else and breathing deeply. What happens in your body? Your **cortisol levels drop**. You **feel more in balance**. Your **heart rate slows**. You **feel calm**.

Like deep breathing, **you can practice mindfulness anywhere, at any time**. You might only get 30 seconds, but it's better than nothing. It's like doing a mini tune-up for your stress levels.

What's this got to do with learning?

Good question. You've been paying attention.

The first thing is that when your body is in equilibrium, **your brain works better.**

The areas of your brain responsible for learning **function more efficiently.** This means you **take in more information and remember it.** You can **recall it more quickly** and **make more connections between different ideas.** This is a good thing if you want to do your best in history, maths or science. (Not so good if you're trying to outrun a tiger, but there aren't many tigers in Melbourne).

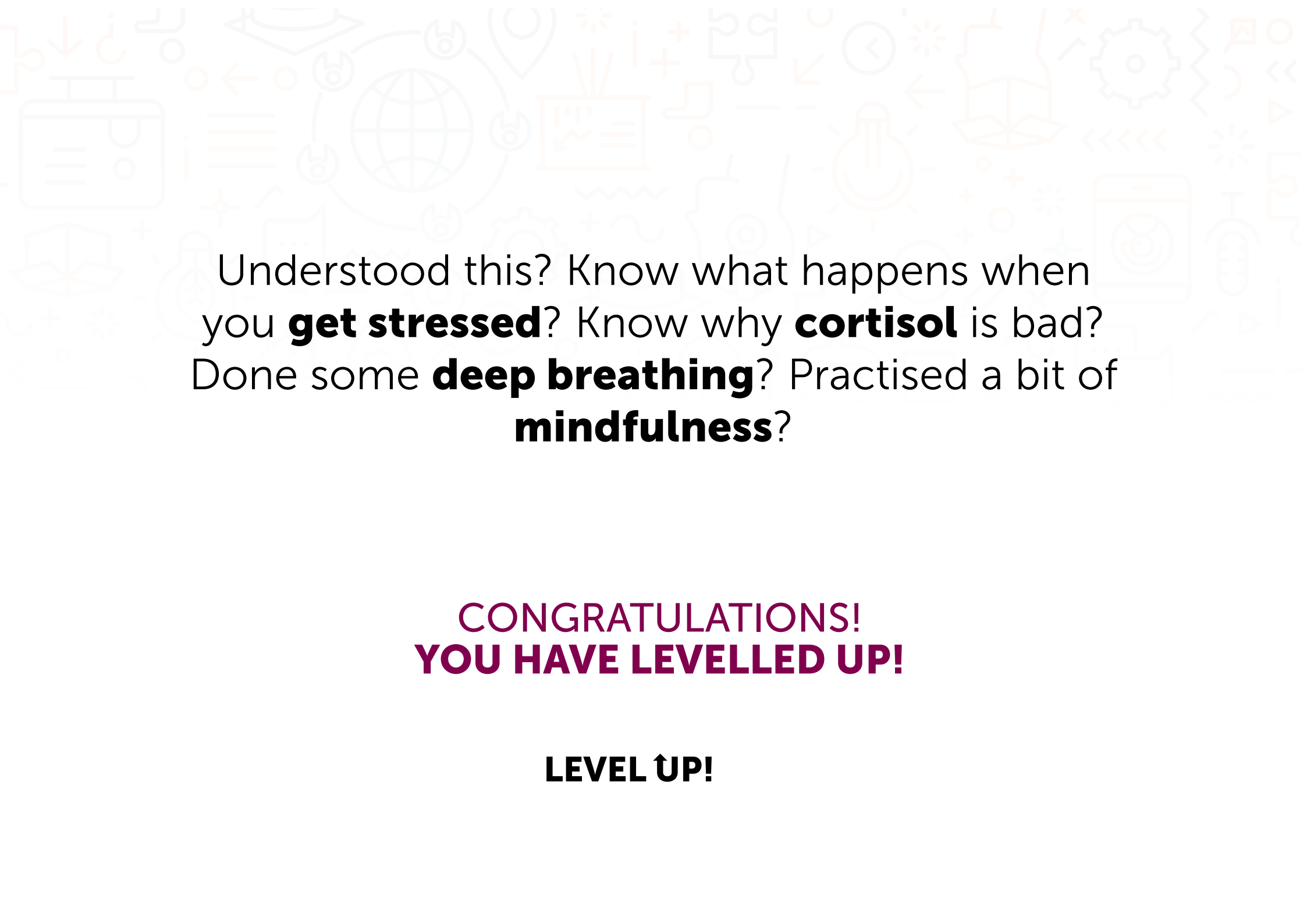
Practising mindfulness also **keeps you healthy.** Your body functions more efficiently, and you can deal with the usual bumps and scrapes and headaches we all get without getting stressed about them.

And this is not just some strange made up nonsense. Lots and lots of **scientific studies support it,** and there are hospitals that use mindfulness to **help cancer patients deal with pain with fewer drugs** or to help people overcome **anxiety from traumatic events,** including soldiers who have been in battle.

So try and practice a **little bit of breathing,** or a **little bit of mindfulness, every day.** You can do it **just before an online class starts, when it is finished, or at a set time.**

If you miss an opportunity, **No drama, Llama,** because there are 24 hours, 1440 minutes and 86400 seconds in a day when you can give it a go. (For science nerds there are also 8.64×10^{13} nanoseconds in a day too. But a nanosecond of mindfulness may be a little too short).

There are also tons of mindfulness apps to help out if you want to try them, like **Calm** and **Headspace.**



Understood this? Know what happens when you **get stressed**? Know why **cortisol** is bad? Done some **deep breathing**? Practised a bit of **mindfulness**?

CONGRATULATIONS!
YOU HAVE LEVELLED UP!

LEVEL UP!