

Soothe your soul WITH SILENCE

Escape the constant noise of life and allow peace and harmony to flourish in your mind and spirit

There's a good reason why we say that silence is golden. As the air begins to fill with the sounds of early summer – children's laughter and barbecues sizzling – zoning out and distancing yourself from life's background noise gives you a sense of peace, letting you recharge and relax in an ever-increasingly hectic world.

We live in mind-boggling times that are crammed with noise and distraction. 'According to the World Health Organisation, noise pollution is the second biggest

environmental threat to our health after air pollution,' explains Rebecca Kelly, founder of the holistic therapy centre, Haelan Therapy (haelantherapy.co.uk).

'It disturbs sleep, concentration and productivity, raises blood pressure and increases the incidences of heart disease but, because we can't see it, it's easy to overlook the serious impact that noise can have on our health.'

And it's not just sounds, such as ringing phones, blaring televisions, car horns and the clatter of building work that overwhelm us, but the non-stop chatter of technology, too.

Our pace of life is driven by social media. smartphones mean we are constantly connected to the 'noise' of the external world and we no longer come home, shut our doors and switch off.

'This constant barrage of noise in our daily lives can damage our physical and mental wellbeing, and slowly the endless noise is cutting off our senses. We are becoming disconnected from ourselves and our ability to simply be,' says Rebecca. 'Rather than tuning into our values and beliefs, or our intuitive selves, we are living in our heads, trying to make meaning of this noise.'

Over time, this drains our mental battery and leaves us less able to appreciate the present moment. On the flip side, bringing more silence into your life could be the antidote to a busy lifestyle, allowing us to be more mindful.

Science is on its side too. A 2013 study found that incorporating two hours of silence into your day helped create new cells in the hippocampus area of the brain, which is linked to learning and emotions. While it sounds counter-intuitive, silence doesn't have to be still. Quieting the mind is more about being in the moment, connecting with your inner self, tuning out to compensate for the amount of stress-inducing noise our minds and bodies receive on a daily basis.

Taking a moment to find silence and solace allows you to let off steam and ignite healing in ways that you probably never thought possible. Here are some of the top activities you can try to do just this.

'Try cultivating your own patch of peacefulness'

HARNESSING THE POWER OF PEACE AND QUIET

1 GET GREEN FINGERED
Spring is a time of renewal and, just as the trees are bursting with blossom and flowers are sprouting everywhere, there's a sense of hope and joy that's suddenly been resurrected after winter fatigue.

With this season of positivity comes a host of beautiful sounds, from the chorus of birds chirping in the morning to the trees rustling as wind passes through branches.

'These noises emit a peaceful silence instead of hostile noise, so try to get as much outside exposure as possible because nature can really aid wellbeing, helping to reduce anger, fear and stress,' says Rebecca.

Flowers and plants hold so many spiritual benefits, so spend time among them appreciating Mother Nature. Try cultivating your own patch of peacefulness, be that in your back garden, on a balcony or even a windowsill. While your mind is quiet, your hands are busy nurturing the earth.

'The feel of a cool breeze and the warmth of the sun on your face all multiply the effect of silence in the core of our wellbeing,' says psychotherapist and counsellor Lynette Evans (thelistinghelper.co.uk).

In Ayurvedic medicine, jasmine (which is best planted in spring) has been used for centuries as a medicinal cure for headaches. It's also a relaxant and can be transformed into an essential oil. Just steep the flowers in a base oil for 24 hours and strain to remove the petals. Place in a dark container to stop the light from spoiling the mixture and splash into the bath or use as a massage oil.

2 CURL UP WITH A BOOK
If your days are busy and you are constantly surrounded by people and technology, rising 30 minutes earlier than everyone else in your household could allow you to catch some stillness and silence. Enjoy this tranquil time by reading.

'Losing yourself in the world of fiction or non-fiction is a very good way to help you turn inward,' explains Rebecca.

Want to take things a step further? Enjoy a silent reading party – a sort of book club with a difference. This type of silent social gathering is popular in the US where bookworms come together in a cafe or bar, read in silence for an hour and then put their books away to mingle with one another.

The idea is that social silence creates positive energy you can feed off and allows you to let go of distractions and just be.

3 CLEANSE YOUR AURA
Water is the essence of life and has purifying properties, so you can use its power to cleanse your body and spirit with an aura bath.

Sinking into a hot tub allows you to switch off from noise while letting your whole body relax and unwind, but take it one step further by ridding your body of any negative noise energy.

Fill your bath with warm water, adding two cups of detoxing Himalayan crystal salts. Soak for around 20 minutes, washing yourself with the water using a flannel. As you do, pray for the release of negative energy and for it to be replaced with positive energy, while imagining a ball of black light (representing the noises of the day) leaving your body and a bright white light entering it. After your bath, continue the self-love ritual with a hand or foot massage.

'Self-massage is a great way to take time out. Simply massaging your hands, feet and legs using scented oils can decrease the stress hormone cortisol and increase feel-good endorphins,' explains Rebecca.

4 MEDITATE IN SILENCE
Meditation can help you find moments of peace and quiet, allowing you to cope better with the noisy pace of life.

'Mindfulness meditation is a great way to find silent space in your day. It allows you to create a deeper connection to the present moment and accept it without judgement,' says Rebecca. 'It can also help to anchor a moment of silence that we can return to when the stresses and noises of life start to intrude on our wellbeing.'

There are studies showing a correlation between meditation and stress relief. Research in 2012 demonstrated that regular meditation helped to improve anxiety symptoms.

You need as little as five minutes of quiet time to help banish the sounds of the day and help focus on the moment. Close your eyes, take a deep breath for four counts and then exhale for eight. As you inhale, visualise the oxygen flooding your body and, as you breath out, imagine all your stress evaporating. Repeat this process five times.

Or, why not try Vipassana meditation? It's a centuries old form of meditation founded in India which, rather than praying or chanting, involves abstaining from vocal sounds, instead concentrating on looking inwards.

It's traditionally taught at silent retreats. You learn to listen and be aware of your thoughts by meditating. Visit dhamma.org for more information. ●