

week in slow motion

for us and Londoners are the worst offenders. Here, five writers drop down a gear and reap the benefits

Easy does it:
Jasmine Gardner
lingers over a light
lunch while Liz
Hoggard is suitably
poised for prose



REBECCA REID

on slow, conscious eating. He is also an expert in other forms of stress-free living such as laughter therapy. **What happens?** Chavda starts by giving you a carrot, which he asks you to eat. Then, he provides a second carrot and talks through the steps of how to eat it properly. You should stop all other activities for at least an hour (half an hour for a snack) when you eat. That means no reading, working, television or talking. His mantra is: "You go to bed in the bedroom so you should dine in a dining room." You must also eat with "awareness" by touching, smelling and tasting your food. And make sure you chew properly. **Verdict:** I have always been terrible at chewing since childhood. Breaking the bad habits proved incredibly difficult, especially as, like many people, I have to eat lunch at my desk. By the end of the week, I haven't quite managed to make a sandwich last 30 minutes. But I'm no longer getting that uncomfortable "stuffed" feeling after every meal. **Cost/contact:** Cost on consultation, according to group size. 07812 690 810, www.artofeating.co.uk.

JASMINE GARDNER

MINDFULNESS MEDITATION
What is it? An ancient form of meditation that teaches you to be more "body aware" by focusing on your breathing, posture and turning negative thoughts into positive ones. **The coach:** Ed Halliwell, instructor at London's Shambhala Meditation Centre and associate of the Mental Health Foundation.

What happened? Ed began by explaining that this form of meditation gives you techniques for coping with stress by tuning in to the rhythms of your body. We then worked through the three simple keys to mastering this technique. First is your posture, which must be upright. You sit on a chair or cross-legged on the floor but mustn't slouch. Your gaze needs to be about five foot in front of you with your eyes open and chin forward. Next, you pay attention to your breathing, which should be normal but gentle. The aim is not to be "led away" by intrusive thoughts. If you do get distracted just repeat the word "thinking" to steer yourself back. **Verdict:** Mindfulness gave me an instant sense of release and relief —

it was hard not to fall asleep in our session. It's easy to fit into a daily routine, even when I'm sitting on the sofa watching television.

Cost/contact: Meditation classes are free on Monday and Tuesday. Courses start from £20. London Shambhala Meditation Centre, 27 Belmont Close, SW4; Ed Halliwell 07989 965994.

SOPHIE GOODCHILD

PACE YOURSELF

What is it? Walking. It could not have been easier — all I had to do was walk everywhere.

The coach: I didn't have a coach, although I was given some helpful advice by Living Streets, an organisation that campaigns for fitness through walking (its Walk to

Work Week runs from 27 April to 1 May). Obviously, walking isn't feasible for those with a long commute but Living Streets advises getting off the train or bus one stop earlier.

What happened? I already walk a lot as I commute only two days a week and spend the rest of the time working from home and looking after my two-year-old daughter. As her average speed is slow, I undertook to do some of my weekly routine on foot to make up some miles. Doing the shopping without the car was the hardest. I had to restrict what I bought and, even with the help of a trolley, it was unpleasant lugging heavy shopping home in a rainstorm. I love walking so when the fine weather towards the end of my stint coincided with Easter and a visit by friends from France, I thoroughly enjoyed planning our sightseeing around walking. Since the Tube network was embarrassingly light on trains, we also had little choice in the matter.

Cost: Nothing spent and probably a lot saved in petrol and fares.

Contact: www.livingstreets.org.uk, 020 7377 4900.

DEBORAH COLCUTT

SNAIL MAIL

What is it? Letters were once the only way to conduct long-distance relationships. Now we can communicate quickly with digital media, letters have lost a lot of their importance. This workshop aims to restore your letter-writing skills and find a deeper way of communicating.



■ www.slowdownlondon.co.uk

The coach: Poet and writer Miriam Nash. She runs classes that explore what happens when we stop texting, emailing and other forms of instant messaging and pick up a pen and paper instead.

What happened? Miriam emphasises that letter-writing isn't about rejecting technology (she uses Facebook as much as anyone). It is a way of expressing the things we really want to say to people. She asked me to write out a list of people who are important to me — a new crush, long-lost lover or dead relative. Next, I had to write them a proper letter. Then I had to compose a letter to my teenage self (back then I wrote abundantly, in embarrassing purple prose) and one to myself in the future.

Verdict: At first I felt a bit embarrassed but this was a great chance to thank people properly, or congratulate them for getting through tough times. I enjoyed the sense of exchange, as did my recipients. And I was surprised at how tactile the whole process was: writing on luxurious card, sealing down the envelope, sticking on the stamp and walking to the post box.

And it will be fascinating to read my own rambling "Dear Liz" letter in a year's time.

Cost/Contact: Snail Mail workshop 25 April between 2-4pm at The Gallery, Foyles, Charing Cross Road, WC2, 020 7437 5660. To reserve your free ticket to this event, please email: events@foyles.co.uk.

LIZ HOGGARD