If you feel like your life is getting slightly out of control, or like you’re not getting enough done, or simply that you’re going from one day to the next just trying to get by, mindfulness might be for you.

It is incredibly simple - it just involves being actively aware of what you’re doing in the present. So, let's say, while you’re ironing, cooking dinner or hanging out with friends, you concentrate on what you’re doing at that moment, not what you’ll be doing in a few hours.

Mindfulness, and how it benefits your life, is one of the key topics that will be talked about at the Third Metric event being held in the UK on 30 July, chaired by Arianna Huffington. The initiative aims to put forth the idea of a third metric of success - wellbeing.

On the panel is Professor Mark Williams, the director of mindfulness at the School of Psychology at Oxford University. In short, if there's anyone who knows all there is to know about mindfulness in Britain, it’s him.

As well as being the author of several books on the subject, he specialises in the treatment of depression and psychological models.
How would you explain mindfulness to the masses?
You are correct in implying that it can be difficult to explain. Mindfulness itself means "lucid, openhearted awareness", and everyone has such awareness in some measure.

However, most of us find that we sleep-walk through life, and become immune to life's riches. From ancient times in Asia, simple meditation practices were developed to help people cultivate mindful awareness and "wake up". It was always seen as pivotal to greater wisdom and compassion.

Modern approaches to mindfulness meditation aims to stay faithful to this tradition, and making the meditation practices relevant to modern life. As the founder of modern applications of mindfulness, Jon Kabat-Zinn, has said:" most of us could do with a bigger dose of awareness in our lives."

Mark Williams: Mindfulness is about observation without criticism; being compassionate with yourself. When unhappiness or stress hover overhead, rather than taking it all personally, you learn to treat them as if they were black clouds in the sky, and to observe them with friendly curiosity as they drift past. In essence, mindfulness allows you to catch negative thought patterns before they tip you into a downward spiral. It begins the process of putting you back in control of your life.

You are one of the key authorities on mindfulness - but how do you make time for yourself?
I find that the early morning, before the house stirs, is the time when I can most easily find time. In the summer the sun is already up, and in the winter the darkness holds its own magic.

What do you do for a time-out when you feel like things are getting on top of you?
I go for a walk or take a breathing space. The breathing space is particularly helpful as it starts by stepping out of automatic pilot, and turning towards whatever is going on in that moment, rather than rushing to change it (which often backfires).

Are British women good at wellbeing and looking after ourselves? Do you think that will change if not?
The great advantage that many women have is their willingness to share their feelings - and to cultivate a sense of deep connection with friends by doing so. It would be a tragedy if greater responsibility in the workplace somehow eroded this quality of being able to value connectedness before autonomy.