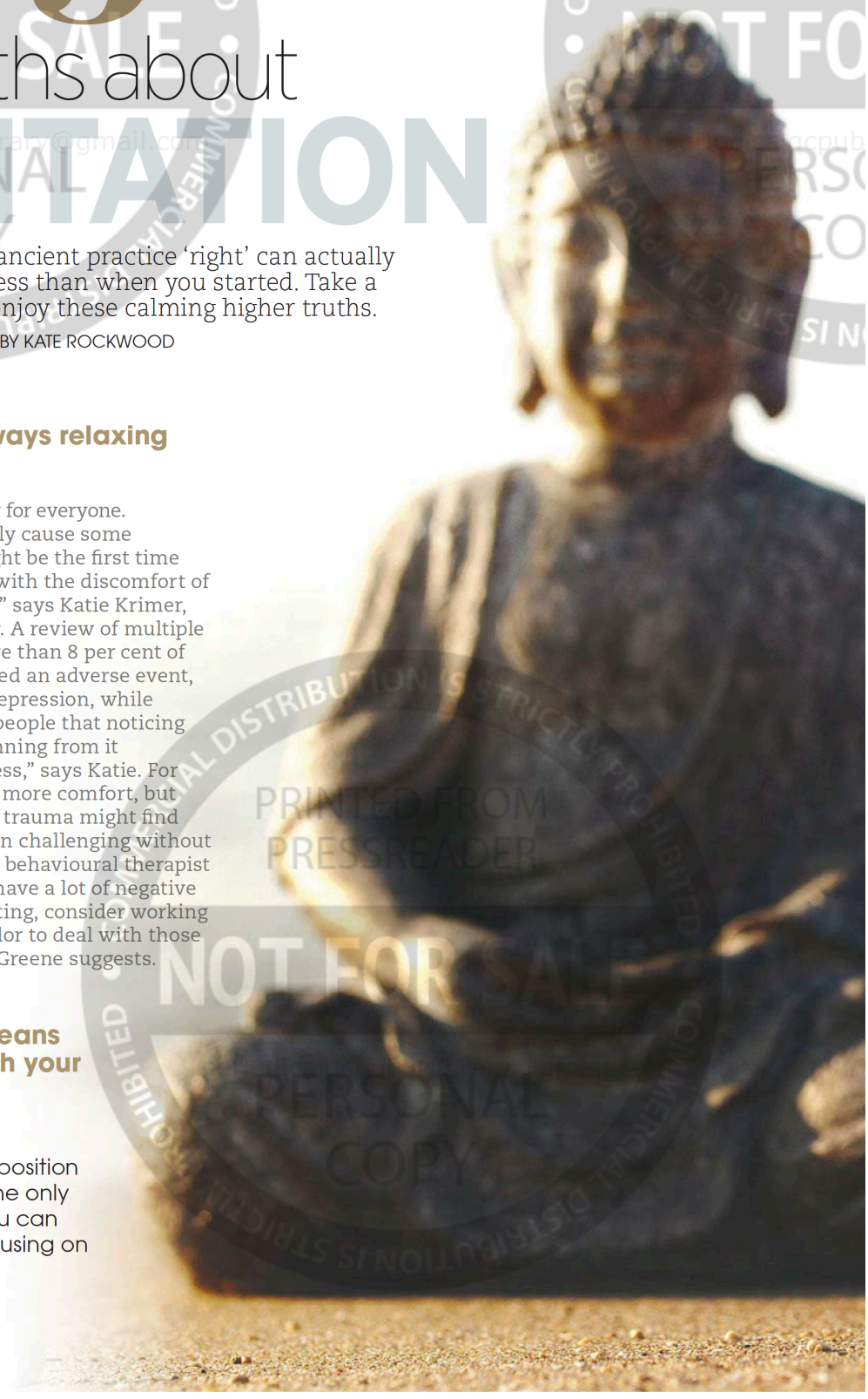
- Meditation

5 myths about MEDITATION

Wanting to do this ancient practice 'right' can actually bring on more stress than when you started. Take a deep breath and enjoy these calming higher truths.

BY KATE ROCKWOOD



1 Meditation is always relaxing

THE TRUTH

Sitting quietly isn't easy for everyone. "Meditation can actually cause some anxiety, because it might be the first time someone begins to sit with the discomfort of their inner experience," says Katie Krimer, a clinical social worker. A review of multiple studies found that more than 8 per cent of participants experienced an adverse event, especially anxiety or depression, while meditating. "I remind people that noticing discomfort and not running from it straightaway is a success," says Katie. For most, practice leads to more comfort, but those with a history of trauma might find mindfulness meditation challenging without support, says cognitive behavioural therapist Dr Paul Greene. If you have a lot of negative thoughts while meditating, consider working with a trauma counsellor to deal with those complex emotions, Dr Greene suggests.

2 Meditation means sitting still with your eyes closed

THE TRUTH

Eyes closed, in lotus position and in silence isn't the only way to meditate. You can do it lying down, focusing on

each body part in turn, from your toes to your scalp (known as a body scan), or by going for a walk somewhere quiet and keeping your attention on the movement of your feet. "Meditation is an intentional practice of redirecting ourselves away from our thoughts, and we can practice regardless of our position or even the level of noise," Katie says. Some people keep their eyes open but unfocused, some might voice a mantra to focus, while others might opt to play music. Whatever helps you feel present and mindfully aware is the right way for you.

3 Some people are just bad at meditation

THE TRUTH

There's no right or wrong way to meditate, which means you can't be 'bad' at it. If you're getting something out of it – say, you feel more relaxed or you're less judgemental of yourself – then you're doing it right. One of the major reasons people think they're crummy at meditation is that they can't clear their minds, but that really isn't the goal here. Meditation isn't about stopping your thoughts; instead, it's about learning to "have more control over your thoughts rather than feeling like they are controlling you," says meditation and mindfulness teacher Joree Rose. The idea is to allow your thoughts and emotions to arise, observe them without judgement or rumination, and then return to the present by focusing on your breath, a mantra, your body, the immediate space around you, or an object, says Kate. But even if you struggle to be mindful of the present moment, "having the intention to sit and attempt to train your awareness and observe the workings of the mind is good enough," she says.

4 Meditation takes up a lot of time

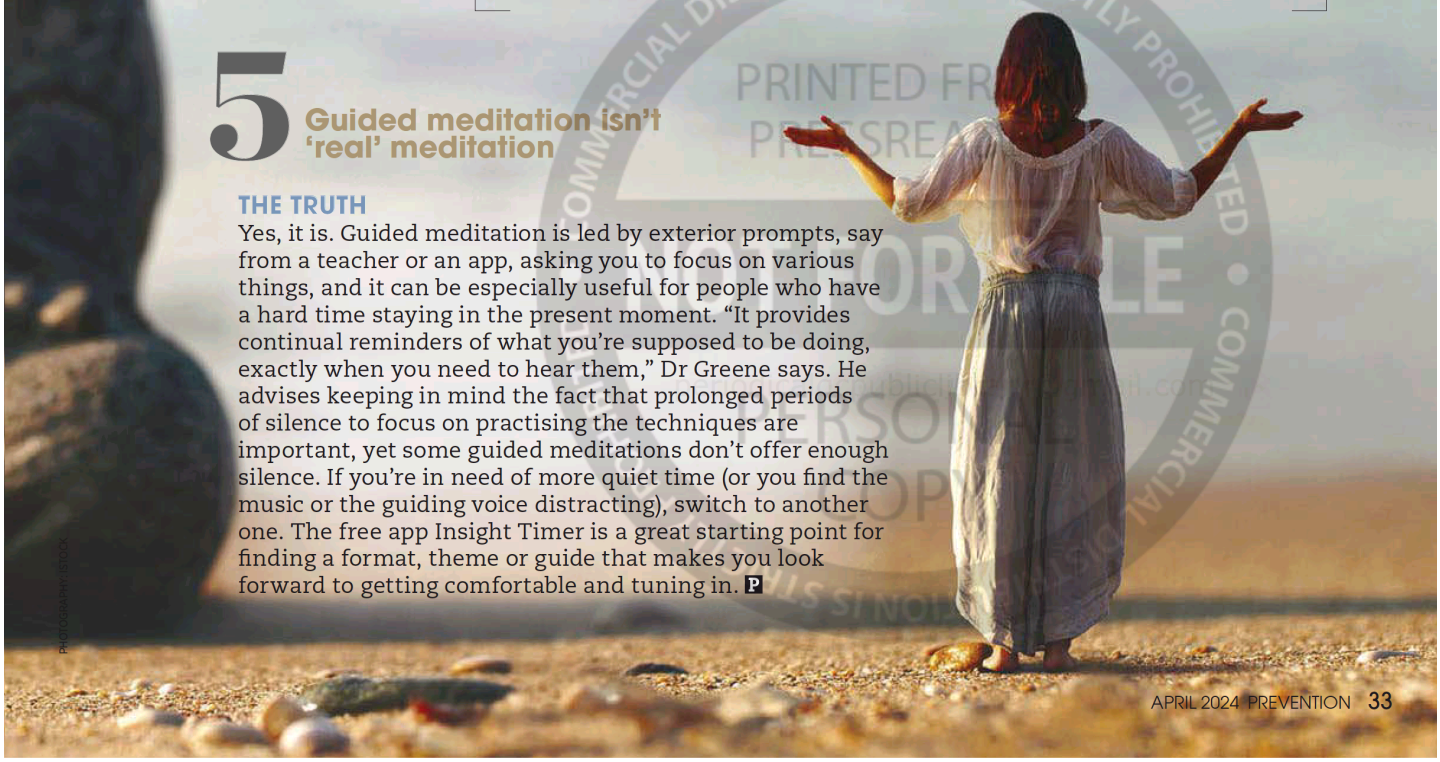
THE TRUTH

Even just one minute of focused breathing can help you deal with negative thoughts or emotions, and one study found that meditating for 25 minutes three days in a row was all it took to lower stress levels. "You don't need to meditate for 45 minutes for it to be worthwhile," Dr Greene says. Still, as with any other healthy habit, it's best to meditate regularly to help it stick. "If you miss a day – or more – the most important thing is to try to resume your daily practice as soon as you can," he says.

5 Guided meditation isn't 'real' meditation

THE TRUTH

Yes, it is. Guided meditation is led by exterior prompts, say from a teacher or an app, asking you to focus on various things, and it can be especially useful for people who have a hard time staying in the present moment. "It provides continual reminders of what you're supposed to be doing, exactly when you need to hear them," Dr Greene says. He advises keeping in mind the fact that prolonged periods of silence to focus on practising the techniques are important, yet some guided meditations don't offer enough silence. If you're in need of more quiet time (or you find the music or the guiding voice distracting), switch to another one. The free app Insight Timer is a great starting point for finding a format, theme or guide that makes you look forward to getting comfortable and tuning in. P



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