

Rude health

Be mindful of need to sit down and switch off

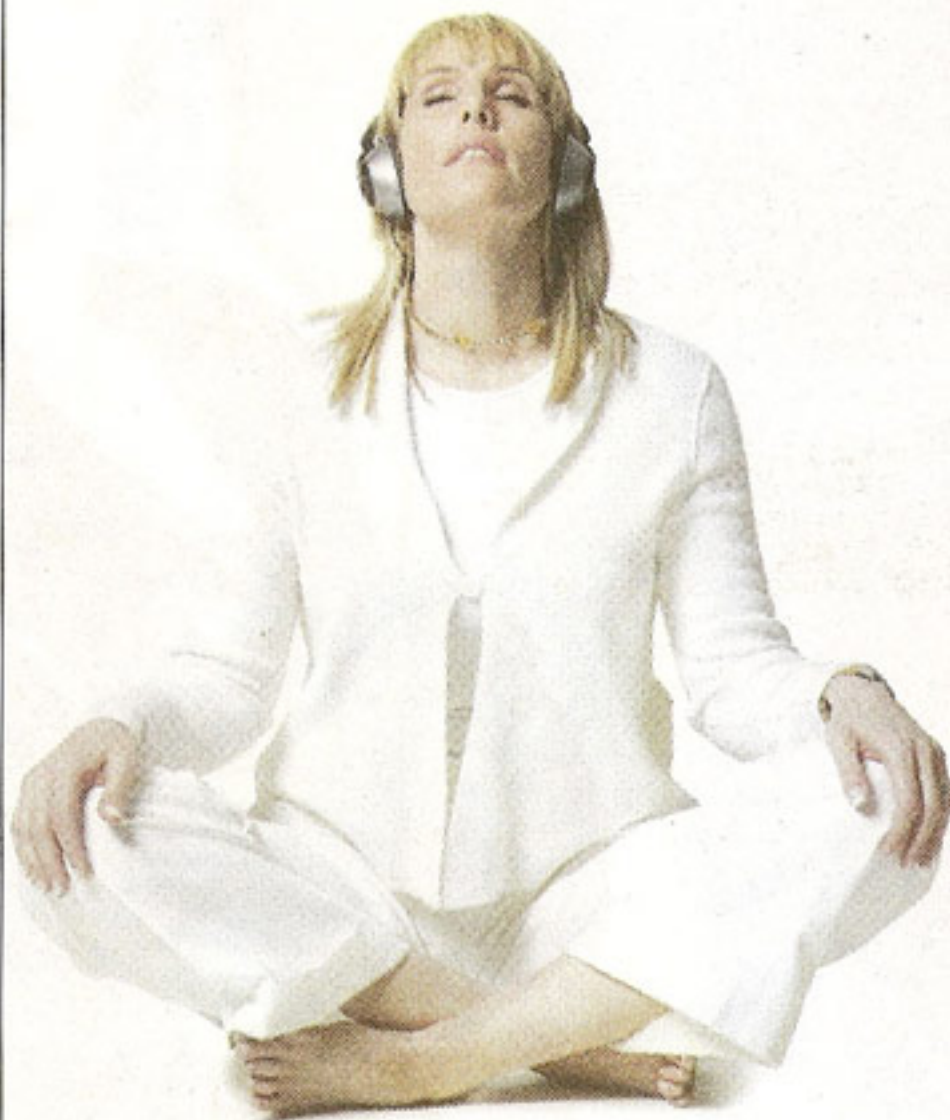
Helen Boylan

Taking five minutes out of the day's 1,440 minutes to declutter the mind can reap huge rewards. One person who swears by the benefits of this practice is 42-year-old Derval Dunford from Castlebar, Co Mayo.

In 2004, Dunford was diagnosed with chronic fatigue brought on by a rare condition called Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS). The first time she knew something was wrong was when, after painting a door using oil paint, she began suffering from severe migraine, nausea and exhaustion.

"When I was diagnosed with MCS, my life completely changed," she says. "I had to give up work and socialising and became a prisoner in my own home, as I couldn't come in contact with household or everyday chemicals found in perfumes, deodorants, or even freshly washed hair or clothes."

But in time, this isolation



Sitting quietly to declutter the mind

GETTY

turned out to be a blessing in disguise. "I used to be a very busy person, always on the go," Dunford says. "In hindsight, I see that I was doing

too much and my body had enough of the pressures I was putting on myself. Developing MCS was my body's way of telling me 'if

you're not going to stop, you will be stopped.'"

Forced to take time out, Dunford began to spend time meditating at home. "Paradoxically, I found that the most effective way of doing something about life's stresses and anxieties was by practising 'non-doing'," she says.

Having developed what she learned during that time, Dunford now presents mindfulness-based meditation and relaxation classes in Westport. Recurring feedback from class participants included them wanting to practise at home what they did in class.

"It can be very difficult to learn to switch off racing thoughts on your own," she said. Unable to find any meditation CDs with guided instruction, she decided to produce her own.

The result is called Sui (the Irish word for 'sitting'), a two-disc set with a booklet of clear instructions which allows people to do a little practice every day in the comfort of their own home. "Each session is timed so

that you don't have the distraction of wondering how long you've been switching off," says Dunford.

One disc comprises a combination of step-by-step instructions narrated by Dunford, sounds of Tibetan 'singing' bowls and periods of silence.

The other disc is non-guided, and is aimed at peo-

ple who prefer to practise their own methods of meditation without the aid of Dunford's voiceover.

"In today's chaotic world, meditation and relaxation need to be seen as necessities, not as luxuries," says Dunford. "In five minutes using Sui you can settle your mind; in 15 minutes, you can drift off to sleep."

The facts

What it is: Sui – a range of guided meditation and relaxation sessions on CD.

What it costs: €24.95.

What it promises: the CD is intended as an aid to assist relaxation and 'mindfulness' (experiencing the present moment and freeing the busy mind from the prison of endless thinking).

It will appeal to beginners and experienced meditation and yoga practitioners alike, and gives a wide variety of meditative and relaxation options ranging from five to 20

minutes. Research has shown that meditation can help to ease stress-related problems such as chronic pain, headaches, anxiety and sleep disorders.

What it delivers: with a little practice, following the narrator's guidance allows the mind's chatter to quieten, aids sleep and brings physical and mental calm.

Where to get it: many health and lifestyle stores around Ireland and online at www.sui.ie or www.daisydiscs.com.