

I'm not a natural baker. I've grilled cupcakes, set fire to oven gloves and produced muffins that could crack teeth. So I mainly leave baking to my husband, who has a passion for adventurous cake recipes (he's the sort of person who has his own pizza shovel!).

But now 'mindful' baking is a thing, I feel I should give it a go. In her book, *Saved By Cake**, novelist Marian Keyes claims regular baking helps keep her depression at bay. Artisan bakeries up and down the country are offering mindful baking workshops (I saw one recently called 'Breaditation'. Yes, really.) And *The Art Of Mindful Baking†*, by Julia Ponsonby, encourages bakers to slow down and engage in the process, to gain a heightened sense of calm.

I'm not, I should add, a naturally 'mindful' person, either. Long ago, I attended a mindfulness workshop where we were instructed to 'explore, with all your senses' a single raisin. Within seconds I'd gone from confused to bored and sceptical. I ate the raisin and spent the rest of the session planning my next grocery shop.

However, now that I'm a frazzled working mum of two children under five, a bit of 'heightened calm', not to mention baked goods, sounds rather attractive. My first attempt with the kids is disastrous. It ends with me shouting 'WHERE'S THE BUTTER?' and getting a tension headache as my two chase each other with spatulas. On my second go, I send the children off with my husband for a few hours and choose a simple banana bread recipe to do on my own.

I play mellow music and do some deep, slow breathing, visualising pulling a golden banana loaf out of the oven, the steam filling the kitchen with its warm, comforting scent. My mouth starts to water. True to the mindfulness ethos, I stay in the moment, noting the feel and give of the butter on my fingertips as I rub it around the baking tin; the crisp sound of the scissors slicing through the parchment paper. Mashing the bananas is a gloriously squishy activity, reminiscent of messy play at nursery, and I can feel the stress in my shoulders melting away.

My research has warned me not to expect a blissed-out state on my first go: mindfulness isn't

Our new wellbeing columnist, Robyn Wilder, tries her hand(s) at mindful baking. Who knew that getting messy in the kitchen could be such good therapy?

The banana bread of life...

about relaxation, necessarily, but rather a useful muscle you learn to work. So while my loaf bakes and my brain nags at me to check my social media on my phone, I sit quietly instead, listening to the hum of the oven.

As for the finished bread? It's knobbly, a little paler than I was expecting and slightly bitter (I used too much baking powder, so my kids won't eat it without a thick layer of chocolate spread). But none of this matters, because this imperfect, little banana loaf represents a pocket of peace I carved out of my day. Plus, I get to eat the results. However, I will never, ever, refer to it as 'breaditation'.