

Mindfulness of Breathing

GETTING READY

The first step of mindfulness practice is to assume a posture that is upright and stable. It may seem a little unusual to focus on posture, but with the mindfulness meditations, you are training not only your mind, but your body too. You can sit either on the floor using a cushion or in a chair with your feet touching the floor. You should not lean against a wall or against the back of the chair. Following these guidelines will allow your breath to flow more easily and deeply:

- Your back should be straight with shoulders and hips level.
- Shoulders are relaxed.
- Head is upright and your neck straight.
- Chin tilted slightly down with your eyes gazing at the floor at about a 45-degree angle.
- Eyes are only partially closed, and the gaze is softened.
- Hands are resting lightly on the thighs with palms face down.

Try to sit as still as possible during the mindfulness of breathing meditation. You can make small adjustments to your posture if you find that you've begun to slump or that your body has begun to lean a little. However, if you find yourself squirming and moving around a lot, it will be more difficult for the body and mind to settle down.

WHAT TO DO

- Begin by breathing deeply into your own abdomen several times. Breathe quietly through your nose with your mouth closed.....
- Sit quietly, pay attention to your breathing (in.....out.....in.....out). Your awareness is staying with the breath..... moment after moment.....as you inhale and then as you exhale.
- Your breath might be long or short..... fast or slow.....deep or shallow.....Regardless of what the breath is like, just notice it. Don't try to control or change it.
- Sometime your awareness may be on the rising and falling of your abdomen.....Other times it might be on the tip of your nose as the breath flows in and out through your nostrils.....At other times it might be more a whole-body awareness of breathing in, and breathing out.....Just noticing and maintaining awareness for the entire breath—breathing in, breathing out.
- When you notice that your attention is on a thought that has arisen gently let it go.....and then allow your awareness to turn back to your breath.
- Do not become frustrated with yourself when thoughts arise. Thoughts are a natural activity of the mind. But do not allow yourself to get caught up in the thoughts—let them come and go.
- Then allow your awareness to rest again on your breath. (Pause for several minutes before beginning the next paragraph).
- At times when you are sitting, some aches and pains, or discomfort will arise. There are several ways to practice with these physical sensations.

(continued)

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- First, turn your attention to that part of your body and allow yourself to experience the physical sensation. What does it feel like? Is it warm or hot? Is there tingling? Or does it feel tight? Try to just notice and feel the sensation without allowing it to morph into thoughts or emotions..... then allow your awareness to turn back to your breathing again.
- A second way of practicing is to begin to observe the physical sensation and intentionally relax that part of your body.....
- A third way of working with this is to try breathing into that part of the body.... Often these sensations will completely disappear or come and go periodically throughout the meditation.
- Sometimes the discomfort may seem too much to manage and you find that your mind has become agitated and is no longer able to focus on the meditation. At these times it's OK to slowly shift to a more comfortable position and then let your awareness rest calmly again in your breath.

HOME PRACTICE

You can find recordings of Mindfulness of Breathing Instructions on a number of websites on the Internet. Feel free to use one for the first couple of times you meditate on your own, if you like.

In general, begin by meditating 20 minutes at a time. You can begin by doing this once day, twice a day if possible. It usually takes 15-20 minutes for the mind and body to settle down, so the optimal session lasts between 20 and 40 minutes. You may want to begin with the shorter time period and work your way up to 30-40 minutes. Setting a timer can be helpful so that you don't have to check the clock. Try to choose times of the day for mindfulness practice when you are not particularly tired.

Some people find that it is easier to establish a mindfulness practice if they practice sitting meditation with others. You can locate these groups and practice centres in your own city through an internet search using words "mindfulness" or "meditation."