

Mindfulness Practice: Awareness of Breathing

Do this practice at a time of the day and location when you're less likely to have interruptions or feel sleepy. It may mean that you close your bedroom door and turn off your phone / computer, or you get up 15 minutes earlier in the morning. Perhaps you may ask your family to be undisturbed for a little while.

There is no need to have a particular goal in mind. You're not trying to feel a certain way, do anything special, or get anything specific out of it. You're simply being present with yourself by stilling the body, tuning in, and quieting the mind for a few minutes. The breathing practice below presents a practice you can do over and over again whenever you choose.

- Settle into a steady and comfortable sitting posture—in a chair or on a cushion on the floor. The back is relatively straight, but not rigid, allowing breathing to be open and easy. Hands can be placed on the thighs or resting loosely together on the lap. The head and neck are balanced. You may either close your eyes or just lower them with a soft gaze.
- Bring your awareness to the sensation of your body touching the chair or cushion, your feet touching the floor, the feeling of the air in the room.
- Gently bring your awareness to the breath as it moves in and out.
- Notice where the breath is most vivid for you. This may be at the nostrils, at the chest as it rises and falls, or perhaps right at the abdomen. You may choose to place your hand on your belly as you notice the expanding and releasing.
- You may be aware of the brief pause between the in-breath and the out-breath.
- Notice the rhythm of your breathing, and be aware of the sensations of the air coming into and filling your body, and then releasing itself and leaving your body.
- Stay present with the experience of breathing. Just allow yourself to breathe in a natural and comfortable way, riding waves of in-breath and out-breath.
- If your attention has wandered off the breath (and it will), gently escort it back to the awareness of breathing. Allow thoughts and emotions to arise without pushing them away or holding onto them. Simply observe them with a very light and gentle curiosity. No need to get carried away by them, or to judge and interpret them.
- If you find it is difficult to hold your attention on the breathing, perhaps try counting the breaths by ascending 1 through 5 (one number for each full breath cycle) and then descending 5 through 1. Or, more simply, silently tell yourself “in” on the in-breath and “out” on the out-breath. With practice, these guiding thoughts may be released and sustained attention will be able to be focused on the breath without additional help.

Mindfulness Practice: Body Awareness

Here is a wonderful practice that helps to ground you and tune you into your body, experiencing it just as it is right now. You may do this practice sitting in a chair or on the floor, lying down (my personal favorite), or standing.

- Allow yourself to settle into a comfortable position in which you feel supported and relaxed, yet will not lead you to fall asleep.
- You may close your eyes or keep them slightly open with a soft gaze, not focusing on anything in particular.
- Rest for a few moments in awareness of the natural rhythm of your breathing.
- Once your body and mind are settled, bring awareness to your body as a whole. Be aware of your body resting and being supported by the chair, mattress, or floor.
- Bring awareness to different parts of your body. You may choose to focus on one particular area of the body or scan your body in a sequence like this one: toes, feet (sole, heel, top of foot), through the legs, pelvis, abdomen, lower back, upper back, chest, shoulders, arms down to the fingers, shoulders, neck, different parts of the face and head.
- For each part of the body, linger for a few moments and notice the different sensations, their quality, intensity, and constancy.
- The moment you notice that your mind has wandered, return your attention to the part of the body you last remember.

If you fall asleep when you do the body scan, that's okay. Your mind and body let go enough to drift off and give you needed rest and recuperation. When you notice that you fell asleep, take a deep breath to reawaken your body, reposition your body if necessary (which may help further wake you up), and, when you are ready, return your attention to the part of the body you last remember.

A Simple Tip to Spark a Moment of Mindfulness

An easy way to remember how to be mindful in the course of a busy day, or when you are feeling overwhelmed, preoccupied, worried, angry, or uncomfortable, is to **STOP**.

S – Stop. Simply pause from what you are doing.

T – Take a few slow, deep breaths with awareness and tune in to the present.

O – Observe and curiously notice your thoughts, feelings, and sensations.

P – Proceed with whatever you were doing with awareness and kindness.