

Mindful Work

Mindful breathing

The starting point for most mindfulness practice, is mindful breathing, or 'conscious breathing'. We simply bring our attention to the physical sensation of our own breath.

One of the advantages of using breathing as a tool in developing mindfulness, is that it's always available.

When we focus our attention on the breathing, and just observe, we actually find that every breath is subtly unique.

Doing this, calm naturally arises, and with it we can see how scattered the mind can be and how elusive full concentration really is. We may also notice the tendency to judge what's happening around us, or in our thoughts. This is normal.

As one's concentration improves, staying in the present moment becomes more and more natural. When that happens, we're less worried and distracted by thoughts of past and future.

The following exercises are very simple, and form the foundation work at all stages of mindfulness training. Wherever you are, whatever you are doing, you have access to practice attention to the breath.

Instructions

First, establish good posture. You can do this sitting on a chair, so sit upright with your head resting naturally balanced. Your hands can rest comfortably on your lap or on your knees, so that there is no strain on the shoulders.

To begin with, it will be easier to close your eyes, but if you get sleepy open your eyes with a soft focus.

When you feel comfortable and settled, you bring your attention to the breathing. Do not try to change the breath in any way. Simply notice as much as you can about the sensation of breathing.

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For example you could simply notice the movement of in breath and out breath; how long and deep they are; whether they are regular or irregular; whether it feels hot or cold. You can focus your attention at the nostrils where the air comes in and out, or to the lungs or the movement of the torso and belly. It doesn't really matter exactly what you focus on, but whatever it is that you choose, stay with that only.

It is perfectly natural for the mind to wander off. When it does that, observe the wandering with interest, not criticism. As soon as you are aware that you have lost concentration, simply bring your attention back to the breathing.

It may help to count the breaths up to 9 and back down again. Then relax for a few moments, and do it again.

Start with no more than 1 minute of practice. You can then experiment with making it longer, and making it shorter.

The 10 second reboot

This simple distress technique combines several simple exercises, that work together to change brain chemistry and fool the body into relaxing. It works!

Here's what you do, in as little as the time it takes to breathe 3 times:

1. On the out-breath, allow it to last longer and let more air out of your lungs. If helpful, count to 3 on the in-breath and 5 on the out-breath.
2. Smile.
3. Feel your feet in contact with the floor, or even imagine roots growing from your feet into the ground, and feel the Earth supporting you.

Breathing practice at work

At work, or in any social interaction, you can employ mindful breathing and no one will know about it!

Here are some triggers you might try out – taking 1 minute, 10 seconds, or whatever feels useful to you:

- Just before you start a new task like writing an email

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- Just before you step into a meeting
- Pausing for a moment when something stressful arises
- As you get up, make a coffee, or close the car door

Try to do this several times every day, or even every hour.