

Mindfulness of the Breath

Tips for this exercise:

- Set an alarm for 2-5 minutes and practice until the alarm goes off. Initially, 5 minutes is a long time, so the idea is to practice for short periods and then gradually extend it up to about 10 minutes. Alternatively, listen to our recording.
- Find somewhere quiet initially to help you practice. As you become more experienced it is useful to practice this whilst you are going about your daily routine, the usual distractions will be there and will increase your skills in noticing when your mind wanders.
- Some people find they feel a bit light-headed, or that they need more air when they first do this exercise. Don't worry, this tends to be because we are not used to focussing on our breath as it is something we do automatically. With practice this should become easier. If it becomes uncomfortable, take a little break and then return to the practice when your breathing feels more normal. Alternatively, start to count your breaths as this will help you slow your breathing.
- It will be really helpful to practice this daily if you can.

Practice

Find somewhere comfortable to sit and do this practice, turn of any distractions. Sit in an upright position with both feet on the floor and rest your hands on your lap, let your eyes rest with a soft focus somewhere in front of you.

Gently bring your awareness to your breath. To begin, take a few long, slow breaths in and out. If you can, breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Place one hand softly on your stomach and notice the rise and fall of your stomach as you breathe in and out (pause).

As you breathe in, notice the sensations in your body (pause). Notice the place where you can feel the air enter your body, notice the temperature of the air (pause). As you exhale, notice the air leave your body, the body sensations that go with this, notice the temperature of the air as you exhale (pause).

Notice the rise and fall of your chest as you breathe in and out. Bring your attention to how fast or slow you are breathing, how deep or shallow. Without trying to change anything, just notice and observe your breath and the sensations this brings (pause).

You may want to count your breath, if you do take time to alternate between counting and focusing on the physical sensations of breathing.

Now, your mind may wander away from your breath, that's OK. If you notice your mind gets distracted by any thoughts, memories, images or noises gently return your attention to your breath. You may need to do this several times, that's OK, just keep noticing when it wanders and returning your focus to your breath.

Continue to notice and observe your breath and the sensations in your body. Continue to let go of any distracting thoughts.

When you are ready (or your alarm goes off), gently return your attention to you sitting in the chair (pause), and now the room.

How can this be useful for me?

This exercise will help enhance your skills in observing, which in turn can help us in learning how to separate our thoughts from our emotions and physical sensations. Additionally, we have our breath wherever we are, so in moments of distress, or when we are getting caught up in distracting or unhelpful thoughts we can always bring our attention to our breath.