

Mindfulness of the Breath

1. Get yourself into a comfortable sitting position, either on a straight-backed chair or on a soft surface on the floor.
2. Allow your back to adopt an erect, dignified, and comfortable posture. Gently close your eyes. It may help to imagine a light thread attached to the back of your scalp pulling your head gently upwards and allowing your spine to lengthen.
3. Focus your attention on the physical sensations of touch and pressure in your body where it makes contact with the floor and whatever you are sitting on. Spend a minute or two exploring these sensations.
4. Now bring your awareness to the changing patterns of physical sensations in the lower abdomen as the breath moves in and out of your body.
5. Focus your awareness on the sensations of slight stretching as the abdominal wall rises with each in-breath, and of gentle deflation as it falls with each out-breath. As best you can, follow with your awareness the changing physical sensations in the lower abdomen all the way through as the breath enters your body on the in-breath and all the way through as the breath leaves your body on the out-breath, perhaps noticing the slight pauses between one in-breath and the following out-breath, and between one out-breath and the following in-breath.
6. There is no need to try to control the breathing in any way—simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can, also bring this attitude of “allowing” to the rest of your experience. There is nothing to be fixed, no particular state to be achieved. As best you can, simply allow your experience to be your experience, without needing it to be other than it is.
7. Sooner or later, your mind will wander away from the focus on the breath to thoughts, planning, daydreams and so on. This is perfectly normal. It is not a mistake or a failure. When you notice that your awareness is no longer on the breath, gently congratulate yourself - you have come back and are once more aware of your experience! You may want to acknowledge briefly where the mind has been (“Ah, I’m thinking”). Then, gently escort the awareness back to a focus on the changing pattern of physical sensations in the lower abdomen, renewing the intention to pay attention to the ongoing in-breath or out-breath, whichever you find.
8. However often you notice that the mind has wandered (and this will quite likely happen over and over and over again), as best you can, congratulate yourself each time on reconnecting with your experience in the moment, gently escorting the attention back to the breath, and simply resume following in awareness the changing pattern of physical sensations that come with each in-breath and out-breath.
9. As best you can, bring a quality of kindness to your awareness, perhaps seeing the repeated wanderings of the mind as opportunities to bring patience and gentle curiosity to your experience.

10. Continue with the practice for 15 minutes, or longer if you wish, perhaps reminding yourself from time to time that the intention is simply to be aware of your experience in each moment, as best you can, using the breath as an anchor to gently reconnect with the here and now each time you notice that your mind has wandered and is no longer down in the abdomen, following the breath. You may wish to focus your concentration by counting your breaths. On the out-breath say "one" quietly to yourself and then "two" on the next out-breath. When you reach "ten", start at the beginning again, saying "one", "two", "three" on the out-breaths.
11. Mindfulness exercises are best done before eating, eg before breakfast or the evening meal. If you have had a drink or used any other drugs, allow their effects to wear off before trying to meditate.