

THE MINDFUL BREATH

Can you remain unmoving until the right action arises by itself? – Lao Tzu

Breathing is something that you do all of the time – yet you may not always be aware of it. Bringing your focus intentionally onto your breath allows you to ground yourself in the present moment. Mindful breathing is the foundation of many other mindfulness exercises. It allows you to practice observing without reacting, simply watching each breath as it happens without feeling a need to change it. The purpose of this exercise is to simply notice, accept and be aware of your breath. However, with practice, many people find that the mindful breath exercise allows them to achieve a state of deep relaxation.

1. Sit in a comfortable position. If you are in a chair, sit with both feet on the ground and your hands in your lap. Allow yourself to feel centered in the chair.
2. Begin by gently moving your attention to the process of breathing. Simply observe each breath as it happens, whether you focus on the rise and fall of your chest or abdomen, or on the sensation of the breath at the nostrils. Really feel what it is like to breathe, without feeling the need to alter your breath, just observing it as it happens. Notice where each breath travels as it enters and departs.
3. Don't intentionally try to change your breathing – simply notice it, pay attention to it and be aware of it. It doesn't matter if your breathing is slow or fast, deep or shallow – it just is what it is. Allow your body to do what it does naturally.
4. You may start to notice that each time you breathe in, your diaphragm or stomach will expand, and each time you breathe out your diaphragm or stomach will relax. Again, don't try to do anything – just be aware of the physical sensations of breathing in and breathing out.
5. As you engage in this exercise you may find that your mind wanders, caught by thoughts or by noises in the room, or bodily sensations. When you notice that this happens, know that this is okay. Simply notice the distraction, but gently bring your attention back to the breath, as often as you need to. Continue to breathe.
6. Before finishing the exercise, take a few moments feel connected with the present moment. Expand your awareness from the breath into the room around you. When you feel ready, open your eyes and bring the exercise to a close.
7. Before you rise, take a few moments to think about what your experience was in this exercise, and how you feel in the present moment.

Start this exercise initially for 5 minutes, building up daily. You can also do this exercise lying down in bed if you have difficulty sleeping. It is simply a way of allowing you to have more mindful and conscious awareness of your body and its surroundings, its breathing and its capacity to relax. When our breathing relaxes, our bodies follow.

