

Mindfulness of Breath

Settle into a comfortable sitting position, either on a straight-backed chair or on a soft surface on the floor, with your buttocks supported by cushions or a low stool. If you use a chair, it is very helpful to sit away from the back of the chair, so that your spine is self supporting. If you sit on the floor, it is helpful if your knees actually touch the floor; experiment with the height of the cushions or stool until you feel comfortably and firmly supported. Allow your back to adopt an erect, dignified, and comfortable posture. If sitting on a chair, place your feet flat on the floor, with your legs uncrossed. Gently close your eyes. Bring your awareness to the level of physical sensations by focusing your attention on the 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.

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. (When you first try this practice, it may be helpful to place your hand on your lower abdomen and become aware of the changing pattern of sensations where your hand makes contact with your abdomen. Having “tuned in” to the physical sensations in this area in this way, you can remove your hand and continue to focus on the sensations in the abdominal wall.) Focus your awareness on the sensations of slight stretching as the abdominal wall rises with each inbreath, and of gentle deflation as it falls with each outbreath.

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 inbreath and all the way through as the breath leaves your body on the outbreath, perhaps noticing the slight pauses between one inbreath and the following outbreath, and between one outbreath and the following inbreath. 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. Sooner or later (usually sooner), your mind will wander away from the focus on the breath in the lower abdomen to thoughts, planning, daydreams, drifting along—whatever. This is perfectly OK—it’s simply what minds do. 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, there’s 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 inbreath or outbreath, whichever you find. 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 inbreath and outbreath. 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.

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.

Mindfulness of Taste

Imagine that you have just come to Earth from a distant planet without such food. Now with the food in your hand, you can begin to explore it with all your senses. Focus on the object (s) as if you have never seen anything like it before. Focus on seeing this object. Scan it, exploring every part of it, as if you've never seen such a thing before. Turn it around with your fingers and notice what color it is. Notice the folds and where the surface reflects light or becomes darker. Next, explore the texture, feeling any softness, hardness, coarseness, or smoothness. While you are doing this, if a thought arises such as "Why am I doing this weird exercise?" "How will this ever help me?" "or "I hate this object (s)," then just see if you can acknowledge these thoughts, let them be, and then bring your awareness back to the object. Take the object beneath your nose and carefully notice the smell of it. Bring the object to one ear, squeeze it, roll it around, and hear if there is any sound coming from it. (Begin to slowly unwrap the object) and slowly take it to your mouth, noticing how the arm knows exactly where to go and perhaps becoming aware of your mouth watering. Gently place the object in your mouth, on your tongue, without biting it. Simply explore the sensations of this object in your mouth. When you're ready, intentionally bite down on the object, maybe noticing how it automatically goes to one side of the mouth versus the other. Also notice the tastes it releases. Slowly chew this object. Be aware of the saliva in your mouth and how the object changes in consistency as you chew. When you feel ready to swallow, consciously notice the intention to swallow, then see if you can notice the sensations of swallowing the food, sensing it moving down to your throat and into your esophagus on its way to your stomach. Take a moment to congratulate yourself for taking this time to experience mindful eating.

A Walk on the River Guided Imagery

Sit quietly in a comfortable position. Feet on floor. Take a deep breath, hold and release. Repeat 3x. You're walking in the woods. It's a warm day, but cool in the shade. Feel the grass and twigs beneath your feet with each step you take. You're walking on a path, but it's a bit overgrown. You have to push tree and bush branches out of your way at times. As you walk you see the green vegetation, the trees, branches and leaves. You are under quite a bit of shade, but the sun is out and small sunbeams travel between the branches. As you look up see the birds flying from one tree to another. There's a slight haze in the air. Notice the bugs, the bees, moths, gnats, horseflies, in the air. Notice the ground beneath you, the path is barely visible. See the wildflowers growing along the path, along with weeds and bushes. Listen to the sounds around you. Hear the birds, the wind blowing the tree branches. As you look ahead, you notice a formation of rocks, like a bluff. You see a small cave. You walk forward and look into the cave, you have to bend over to peer inside. Notice how cool it is in there, notice the smell. Look inside, it's dark and you can't see much. Bend over further as you attempt to enter the cave. A large drop of cold condensation drops from the top on the entrance onto the back of your neck. You jump in surprise and hit your head on the roof of the cave. Feel the cold drop of water run down your back. Move out of the cave, walking backwards (the cave is too small to explore). As you continue to walk down the path you can hear water running. Notice the smells around you as you continue to walk. Notice the smell of the vegetation, the trees, leaves, the dirt, the flowers. You can smell something damp. As you move forward the smell is more clear, smells crisp, somewhat fishy, as you get closer to the river. As you notice the smell of the river, the vegetation becomes more sparse. You walk out of the woods onto a gravel bar. Notice how the gravel and rocks feel under your feet. Some of the rocks are loose and your footing isn't as steady. You look over on the river, notice the current. You see the current moving briskly, you see a root wad in the middle of the stream. Notice the foam that gathers, notice how the river moves around the root wad. You see something floating, maybe swimming or slithering down the river, maybe a snake? Look across the river. You see a bluff with ancient rock formations that came from years of erosion. Look at the various colors of the rock, you see many shades of brown, some colors that appear iridescent or pearly. Notice the trees and bushes all along the bluff. Notice the height of the trees, continue to look up until you see the blue sky over the trees. There are several large fluffy clouds in the sky and the sky is a bright deep blue. You look down at your feet and you remove your shoes and walk towards the water. Notice how the rocks and gravel feel on your bare feet. Notice the heat of the rocks and gravel. Walk into the river. Notice how clear and blue the river is, you can see the river floor. Notice how cold the water is to your feet. Notice how the current moves around you as it flows downstream. Look at the slit that comes up as you take a step forward. Notice how the water becomes cloudy when your feet make an impact on the river floor. Stand still for a moment, notice the difference in temperature between your feet and lower legs and the rest of your body which is still dry. You feel small nips at your toes and ankles, you notice minnows and tadpoles swirling around your feet. Take in the smells around you, the river smells muddy, fishy, wet, but yet clean and crisp. Feel the heat of the sun on your face and arms. Walk back to the gravel bar. Notice the temperature change as you emerge from the water. The dirt, sand and gravel stick to your wet feet as you walk from the water. Find a large flat rock and have a seat and recline back. Feel the sand and gravel dry on your feet. Stretch your back and feel the sun on your face. Sit back up and brush your feet off. Notice the feel of the sand and dirt on your hands. Put on your shoes and turn around back to the path to the woods.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Begin by finding a comfortable position sitting, standing, or lying down. You can change positions any time during the progressive muscle relaxation exercises to make yourself more comfortable as needed. The first progressive muscle relaxation exercise is breathing. Breathe in forcefully and deeply, and hold this breath. Hold it...hold it... and now release. Let all the air go out slowly, and release all the tension. Take another deep breath in. Hold it.... and then exhale slowly, allowing the tension to leave your body with the air. Now breathe even more slowly and gently... breathe in....hold....out.... breathe in...hold...out... Continue to breathe slowly and gently. Allow your breathing to relax you.

The next progressive muscle relaxation exercise focuses on relaxing the muscles of your body. Start with the large muscles of your legs. Tighten all the muscles of your legs. Tense the muscles further. Hold onto this tension. Feel how tight and tensed the muscles in your legs are right now. Squeeze the muscles harder, tighter... Continue to hold this tension. Feel the muscles wanting to give up this tension. Hold it for a few moments more.... and now relax. Let all the tension go. Feel the muscles in your legs going limp, loose, and relaxed. Notice how relaxed the muscles feel now. Feel the difference between tension and relaxation. Enjoy the pleasant feeling of relaxation in your legs. Now focus on the muscles in your arms. Tighten your shoulders, upper arms, lower arms, and hands. Squeeze your hands into tight fists. Tense the muscles in your arms and hands as tightly as you can. Squeeze harder.... harder..... hold the tension in your arms, shoulders, and hands. Feel the tension in these muscles. Hold it for a few moments more.... and now release. Let the muscles of your shoulders, arms, and hands relax and go limp. Feel the relaxation as your shoulders lower into a comfortable position and your hands relax at your sides. Allow the muscles in your arms to relax completely. Focus again on your breathing. Slow, even, regular breaths. Breathe in relaxation.... and breathe out tension..... in relaxation....and out tension.... Continue to breathe slowly and rhythmically. Now focus on the muscles of your buttocks. Tighten these muscles as much as you can. Hold this tension..... and then release. Relax your muscles. Tighten the muscles of your back now. Feel your back tightening, pulling your shoulders back and tensing the muscles along your spine. Arch your back slightly as you tighten these muscles. Hold.... and relax. Let all the tension go. Feel your back comfortably relaxing into a good and healthy posture. Turn your attention now to the muscles of your chest and stomach. Tighten and tense these muscles. Tighten them further...hold this tension.... and release. Relax the muscles of your trunk. Finally, tighten the muscles of your face. Scrunch your eyes shut tightly, wrinkle your nose, and tighten your cheeks and chin. Hold this tension in your face.... and relax. Release all the tension. Feel how relaxed your face is. Notice all of the muscles in your body.... notice how relaxed your muscles feel. Allow any last bits of tension to drain away. Enjoy the relaxation you are experiencing. Notice your calm breathing.... your relaxed muscles.... Enjoy the relaxation for a few moments....

When you are ready to return to your usual level of alertness and awareness, slowly begin to re-awaken your body. Wiggle your toes and fingers. Swing your arms gently. Shrug your shoulders. Stretch if you like.

You may now end this progressive muscle relaxation exercise feeling calm and refreshed.

Leaves on a Stream

1. Find a comfortable position and close your eyes or fix your eyes on a spot.
2. Visualize you're sitting by the side of a gently flowing stream, and there are leaves flowing past on the surface of the stream. Imagine it however you like.
(Pause 10 seconds.)
3. Now, for the next few minutes, take every thought that pops into your head, place it on a leaf and let it float on by. Do this regardless of whether the thoughts are positive or negative, pleasurable, painful, or neutral. Even if they are joyous or enthusiastic thoughts, place them on the leaf and let them float on by.
(Pause 10 seconds.)
4. If your thoughts stop, just watch the stream. Sooner or later your thoughts will start up again.
(Pause 20 seconds.)
5. Allow the stream to flow at its own rate. Don't speed it up. You're not trying to wash the leaves away – you're allowing them to come and go in their own good time.
(Pause 20 seconds.)
6. If your mind says, *this is stupid*, *I'm bored*, or *I can't do it*, place those thoughts on a leaf.
(Pause 20 seconds.)
7. If a leaf gets stuck, let it hang around. Don't force it to float away.
(Pause 20 seconds.)
8. If a difficult feeling arises, such as boredom or impatience, simply acknowledge it. Say to yourself, "here's a feeling of boredom" or "here's a feeling of impatience." Then place those words on a leaf, and let the leaf float on by.
9. From time to time, your thoughts will hook you, and you'll lose track of the exercise. This is normal and natural, and it will keep happening. As soon as you realize it happened, gently acknowledge it and then start the exercise again.

Continue this exercise for several minutes. You may need to remember: "again and again, your thoughts will hook you. This is normal. As soon as you realize it, start the exercise again from the beginning."

Source: Harris, R. (2009). *ACT Made Simple: An Easy-To-Read Primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.

Informal Mindfulness Exercises

Mindfulness in Your Morning Routine

Pick an activity that constitutes part of your daily morning routine, such as brushing your teeth, shaving, or showering. When you do it, totally focus on what you are doing: the body movements, the taste, the touch, the smell, the sight, the sound etc. For example, when you're in the shower, notice the sounds of the water as it sprays out of the nozzle, and as it hits your body as it gurgles down the hole. Notice the temperature of the water, and the feel of it in your hair, and on your shoulders, and running down our legs. Notice the smell of the soap and shampoo, and the feel of them against your skin. Notice the sight of the water droplets on the walls or shower screen, the water dripping down your body and the steam rising upwards. Notice the movements of your arms as you wash or scrub or shampoo.

When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and bring your attention back to the shower. Again and again, your attention will wander. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to the shower.

Mindfulness of Domestic Chores

Pick an activity such as ironing clothes, washing dishes, vacuuming floors, and do it mindfully. For example, when ironing clothes: notice the color and shape of the clothing, and the pattern made by the creases, and the new pattern as the creases disappear. Notice the hiss of the steam, the creak of the ironing board, the faint sound of the iron moving over the material. Notice the grip of your hand on the iron, and the movement of your arm and your shoulder.

If boredom or frustration arises, simply acknowledge it, and bring your attention back to the task at hand. When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and bring your attention back to what you are doing. Again and again, your attention will wander. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to your current activity.

Source: Harris, R. (2009). *ACT Made Simple: An Easy-To-Read Primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.