

PRACTICE #2

MINDFUL BREATHING MEDITATION

Benefits

- Relieves pain
- Fewer side effects of chemotherapy: less nausea, fatigue, anxiety
- Increased immune system functioning
- Greater sense of control
- Increased self-awareness
- Greater sense of calm, peace, happiness
- Greater resilience

Definitions - Descriptions

Mindfulness: Cultivating awareness of your experience in the present moment, living each moment as fully as possible

Meditation: Paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment.

Inner Resource: The Breath and Breathing

- The breath is the life force
- Breathing gives us life
- Inhaling brings oxygen to cells
- Exhaling releases waste – carbon dioxide
- Rhythmic breathing balances the nervous system

Mindful breathing

- Gentle focus of attention on the breath
- Coming in and going out
- Not trying to change your breathing in any way
- No expectations
- Simply awareness of the breath moment to moment

Preparation

Find a comfortable position, either sitting or lying down, with your head, neck and spine aligned. Uncross your legs and let your hands rest quietly in your lap or by your sides. Loosen any tight clothing and gently close your eyes.

Script: Mindful Breathing Meditation

*Adapted from Thich Nhat Hanh, "A Short Teaching on Mindfulness Breathing"
(Excerpts in quotes)*

As your body settles and your eyes close, bring your awareness to your breathing. Notice the breath coming in, and the breath going out. Follow the breath with your awareness... follow the breath all the way in... and follow the breath all the way out... not trying to change it in any way. Just breathing in... and breathing out. Breathing in, feeling the breath as it passes through your nostrils... breathing out, feeling the breath as it leaves your nostrils. Keeping your awareness lightly and gently on your breath... breathing mindfully in the present moment.

“Breathing in, I know I am breathing in...
Breathing out, I know I am breathing out.”

If thoughts come in...as they always do... acknowledge the thoughts, without judgment, and let them go... let them drift away like clouds floating across the sky... and bring your awareness back to your breath, back to your breathing... back to the present moment.

“Breathing in... I know I am breathing in...
Breathing out... I know I am breathing out...”

Each time your attention moves away from the breath... distracted by a thought about something you have to remember to do perhaps... or maybe something that is bothering you or worrying you... notice the thought, acknowledge the thought, and then let it go... and bring your awareness back to your breath, back to the present moment. Letting your full awareness be on the breath... as it comes in... and as it goes out... noticing the familiar rhythm of the breath.

“Breathing in, I calm my body...
Breathing out, I smile...”

When you bring your awareness to the breath in this way, you are connecting the mind and the body in the present moment. The word for breath and the word for spirit in many languages is the same. So bringing your awareness to your breath, connects mind, body and spirit in the present moment.

“Dwelling in the present moment...
I know this is a wonderful moment...”

Continue to mindfully breathe in this way for as long as you like... following the breath all the way in... noticing the slight pause at the turning point as the in-breath becomes the out-breath... and following the breath all the way out... noticing the brief pause at the turning point as the out-breath becomes the in-breath... aware of the steady familiar rhythm of the breath.

Continue for 10-15 minutes if possible

As we bring this meditation to an end, keeping your eyes closed for just a little while longer... take a moment to notice how you are feeling... your body... your mind... your spirit. If you like, offer gratitude for this time you have taken for yourself... to be quiet... to breathe.. and bring yourself back into balance.

So slowly come back into the room... aware of your body in the chair... opening your eyes whenever you are ready.

Applications for Mindful Breathing Meditation

Regular Daily Practice

- Set aside 5-10 minutes at a regular time in the morning or evening, or both, to practice
- If you practice every day at regular times, you will have greater access to this resource in difficult situations that arise in your daily life

Throughout the day

- Use mindful breathing to calm you throughout the day: when you brush your teeth, stop at a red light, waiting for an appointment, when the phone rings, etc. Find your own times to use mindful breathing.
- Put “breathe” signs on your mirror, kitchen cabinet, or dashboard to remind you to breathe, mindfully and deeply, if only for a moment or two.

In stressful situations and/or emergencies

- When you find yourself starting to feel tense, anxious, or in pain, use your breathing to calm you. Take 5 mindful breaths, or 3 breaths. Taking even one conscious breath can make a difference.