

Mindfulness of breath: Exercises to try

Exercise 1 Abdominal Breathing

Lie on your back or sit in a comfortable position, relax your shoulders and maintain a straight spine. Notice the rise and fall of your belly with each breath. If your mind wanders then that's okay. Bringing your mind calmly back to focus on your breath is also useful for the exercise. Practice daily until you can do it almost anywhere, providing you with an instant relaxation tool any time you need one



Exercise 2 4-7-8 Relaxing Breath Exercise

You can do the exercise in any position, sit with your back straight while learning the exercise. Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue just behind your upper front teeth, and keep it there through the entire exercise. You will be exhaling through your mouth around your tongue; try pursing your lips slightly if this seems awkward.

- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
- Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of **four**.
- Hold your breath for a count of **seven**.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of **eight**.
- This is one breath. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

Note that with this breathing technique, you always inhale quietly through your nose and exhale audibly through your mouth. The tip of your tongue stays in position the whole time. Exhalation takes twice as long as inhalation. The absolute time you spend on each phase is not important; the ratio of 4:7:8 is important. If you have trouble holding your breath, speed the exercise up but keep to the ratio of 4:7:8 for the three phases.

Exercise 3 Tune into the Breath

Tune into your breathing at different times during the day. Be aware of the rise and fall of the belly for a few breaths. Notice your nostrils, chest expansion and upper stomach expansion.

Do not force the breath, simply feel it. Take note of your thoughts and feeling at these times. How you are feeling mentally and physically? Notice changes in your perception over time.

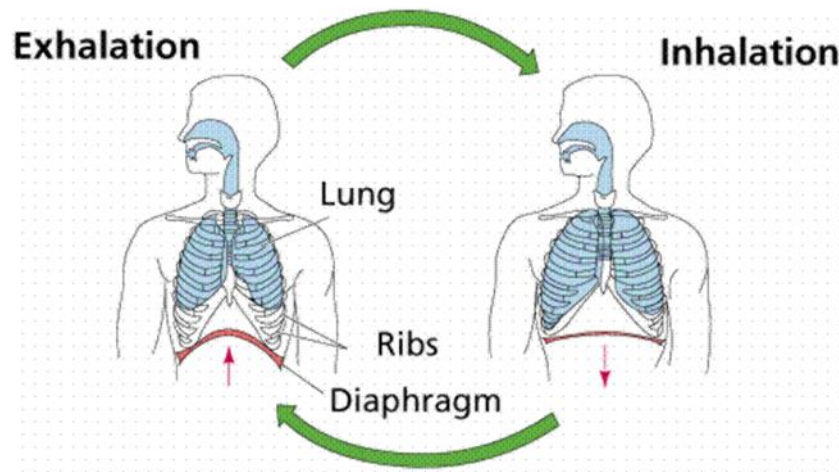
Kabat-Zinn, Jon. "Chapter 3: The Power of Breathing." *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*. New York, NY: Pub. by Dell Pub., a Division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Pub. Group, 1991. 47-58. Print.

Kabat-Zinn, Jon. *Coming to Our Senses: Healing Ourselves and the World through Mindfulness*. New York, Hyperion, 2006.

Just Breathe

When learning to develop mindfulness of breath, one simply observes the sensation of breath. Usually we do not even think about the breath as we go about our life unless we have some physical ailment concerning our ability to breathe. Mindful breath can be practiced at any time; it does not have to be a prearranged time, one can observe the breath while driving, walking, even when talking to someone to keep in the moment if feeling distracted or anxious.

This observation of the breath follows the entire breath cycle from the initiation of the inhale to the completion of the exhale. When witnessing the breath cycle one will even note a momentary pause prior to inhale and then another prior to the exhale.



By changing our breathing we can influence millions of biochemical reactions in our body, producing more relaxing substances such as endorphins and fewer anxiety-producing ones like adrenaline. Shallow breathing through the chest means you are disrupting the balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide necessary to be in a relaxed state.

Regular full, deep breathing is a good way to reduce tension, feel relaxed, and reduce stress. Breath focus helps you disengage from distracting thoughts and sensations. You may want to try several different relaxation techniques to see which one works best for you.

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