

Relaxation Breathing

What is stress or anxiety?

Physical sensations: rapid breathing, heart beating faster, and muscle tension that could result in sleep difficulties, digestive issues, cardiovascular problems, inflammation

Racing thoughts of worry, rumination, the “what ifs” that can lead to feeling overwhelmed, irritable, angry, hopeless and uncomfortably sensitive

Behavior of scanning for danger, procrastinating, wanting to escape or avoid by using intoxicants, food or any obsessive behavior to desperately seek comfort, desperately trying to fix or regain control

One Minute Practice

1. Position yourself into a relaxed posture.
2. Close your eyes half-way or completely.
3. Go within and simply notice thoughts, emotions, and body sensations without trying to change them. Observe if you're bored, content, anxious, joyful, tense, curious, and so on.
4. Feel the physical sensations of breathing.
5. Place more awareness on the exhale for three natural breaths.
6. To slow down the exhale, make your lips small as if you are about to blow into a straw.
7. Extend the slow exhale as long as possible out through the small opening of your mouth, and let the inhale come in naturally through your nose, waiting to take the next exhale.
8. When your body is ready to exhale, again make the exhale as long and slow as possible as you did in the previous step, for another six more breathing cycles. Remember to let the inhale happen without effort. If you start to feel light-headed, stop for about 10 seconds and then resume. Long, slow exhaling is all you need to remember.

Avoiding stress often creates more stress, a sure way to limit your life. Next time you feel anxious, depressed or stress, instead of trying to escape the discomfort, move into it with gentleness, shifting your awareness toward unwanted physical sensations, thoughts, and emotions. This is a process of learning to be kind to ourselves. Acknowledging our experiences is like viewing clouds form and disappear. Practicing long, slow exhales are the winds of change

that can slow down the heart rate and increase our capacity to see if our fears are potentially dangerous or not, empowering us so that when the clouds of anxiety hang over us, it may not be necessary to run for shelter.

MINDFULNESS IN ACTION

Working with unwanted thoughts, emotions, and sensations

Practice:

1. Anytime you are walking, inside your home or outdoors, and if you notice you're thinking, acknowledge what you are thinking.
2. Then, gently shift your awareness to the physical sensations of your body, especially the bottom of your feet.

Mindfulness means to be aware of our sensations, emotions, and thoughts, memories, and mental images, observing our internal and external worlds, without criticism and without trying to avoid the uncomfortable aspects of life, nor desperately cling to what is comfortable.

The strategy of mindfulness is one way to get the mind unstuck by shifting our awareness to our senses, to what we're hearing, physically feeling, seeing, etc. The practice above involves acknowledging thoughts and shifting to our senses, from the conceptual to the experiential.

We view the world through two primary lenses, the *conceptual* and *experiential*. It's important to find a balance between these worlds.

The conceptual world is the world of thinking, concepts, unwanted and wanted thoughts, ideas, strategies, memories, mental images, night terrors, and stories about who we *think* we are, or *ideas* or *assumptions* we have about what is taking place that are sometimes helpful and at other times not.

The experiential (our senses) is a world of direct experience. For example, the thought may be, "I need to get to the store before it closes," then shifting our awareness to the physical sensations in feeling the feet and legs that are bringing you to the store. Another example to contact the experiential is placing your awareness on your hands while washing them, or while you're cooking, or any activity your hands are involved in as a way of experiencing ordinary physical feelings.

When we are in contact with our senses without the overlay of thoughts, we move from feeling overwhelmed to simplicity, ordinary reality. There is no “perfect” in this process, which is why it is called a practice, a practice of psychological flexibility, moving from the conceptual to the experiential. The more we practice shifting our awareness in a gentle way, without judgment, the more capacity we develop to be with unwanted thoughts, emotions, and sensations.