

Lesson 2

Mindful Breathing

Introduction

Want to know how to do mindful breathing effectively?

Don't feel like you have the time to concentrate on your breathing?

Think there are more important ways of spending 10 minutes a day?

Mindful breathing is simple to learn and can help anchor you to the present.

In this lesson, you'll learn how to breathe in the most effective way, reap the physical and emotional benefits, and feel healthier.

Science

Research tells us that there are a range of physical and emotional benefits to mindful breathing. It reduces stress levels in the body; lowers heart rate and blood pressure; improves diabetic symptoms; reduces depression; helps manage chronic pain; helps regulate the body's reaction to fatigue and stress; and reduces the risk of burnout in caregivers.

Our 'breathing centre' has a powerful influence on higher-order brain functioning, including, alertness, attention, and stress.

Mindful breathing meditation works best at the start of the day. Short bursts of five to 10 minutes is ample. Gradually, you'll notice that it's easier to focus on the present.

Value

With practice, mindful breathing will help you live more in the moment than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future.

Being aware of the benefits mindful breathing can bring you, you'll be more likely to put the little effort it takes to reap the many health rewards.

Knowing the improvements mindful breathing can bring to your own physical and mental health, you'll want to encourage others to do the same.

Practicing mindful breathing will help regulate your responses to stressful situations.

Mindful breathing will train your attention which will enable it to work to maximum capacity on other tasks.

Exercise: Silent Breeeeeathing

This exercise will take five minutes to complete, but if we want to continue after it ends, we can do.

It can be difficult doing just one thing at once. Something as simple as observing our breath can prove quite challenging. But we all breathe, so we've jumped the first hurdle. The second obstacle we have to consider is timing. It's no use learning to breathe mindfully when we have plans to go out straight afterwards, or if there's a pressing issue that requires our attention. Once we've developed the skill of mindful breathing, we can bring it into play as and when we need to refocus and destress.

So, let's begin. We'll find a quiet place where we can practice observing our breath, in silence. We'll make sure our clothes are loose and not tight and we're sitting or lying in a comfortable position.

We can close our eyes if we wish, or close them. We'll take a moment to notice the contact points of our body on the surface we're leaning on.

Now, concentrating on the rise and fall of our abdomen. As we inhale, we notice our abdomen gently moving outwards. As we exhale, it falls back inwards towards our spine.

If thoughts appear in our mind, we'll notice them before gently placing them to one side. We'll do this each and every time.

We'll observe the quality of our breaths – shallow or deep, relaxing or painful, cool or warm.

Noticing any other sensations as we breathe – any tingling, aches, pains. Not trying to change them, just observing and accepting them.

Noticing any emotions that arise whilst breathing, but again, not changing them.

Silence...

Bonus tip

Try starting your mindful breathing first thing in the morning, or last thing at night, when distractions are at a minimum. Start with five minutes' practice, then gradually extend to 10 minutes, then 15 minutes.

Wrap

Mindful breathing can be easily implemented but challenging due to the busy lives we lead and mounting distractions as the day progresses.

Being aware of the many benefits of mindful breathing can be the catalyst to you starting this practice. Observing improvements in your health and life satisfaction as a result, you'll wonder why this ancient practice has evaded you for this long!

CTA

If you'd like to know how to build mindfulness into a walk, our next lesson takes you through this with a handy 'practice with me' video to boot.