

Exercise sheet

MINDFUL BREATHING



- Lie down comfortably on your bed, preferably on your back, with your hands by your side or on your belly to help you feel your breath. Now you can gently close your eyes...
- Bring your awareness to the physical sensations in your body. Notice the points where your body is in contact with and pressing into the mattress. Take a minute or two to explore these sensations...
- During this exercise, you are going to try, as best you can, to give your full attention to your breathing, to the path of your breath in your body...
- There are different places in your body where you can become aware of your breath. First, you are going to observe the different sensations in your nostrils when you breathe in and when you breathe out. You may notice a difference in the temperature of the air coming in and going out of your nose. Or you may feel the sensation on your upper lip when your breath leaves your nose as you exhale...
- Now, you are going to observe your breath in your rib cage. As you breathe in, feel your breath coming in through your nose, going down into your lungs and the rib cage expanding... and as you breathe out, feel or imagine your breath coming back out through your nose, the rib cage returning to its usual place. For a few moments, turn your attention to the different sensations in the rib cage when you breathe in and when you breathe out... It is not about trying to control the breath in any way. Let the breath come and go freely. Even if you think your breathing seems irregular, fast, short or the opposite, let it be what it is. Just let the breath breathe on its own, as it does when you are not paying attention to it.
- As best you can, try to extend this attitude of allowing, of accepting, to your entire experience. There is nothing to be solved, no particular state to be achieved. As best you can, just allow your experience to be your experience right now, with no need for it to be anything other than what it is.

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- Now you are going to observe your breath in your abdomen. Focus your awareness on the sensations of gentle stretching as the abdominal wall rises with each inhalation and of gentle deflation as it falls again with each exhalation. As best you can, let your awareness follow the fluctuating physical sensations in the lower belly and the entire journey of the breath as it enters your body on the inhalation and its path as it leaves your body on the exhalation... perhaps noticing slight pauses between one inhalation and the next exhalation, and between one exhalation and the next inhalation...
- Become aware of the air passing through the nostrils, the throat, the lungs and down into the belly... Follow the breath as it goes back and forth, from one moment to the next, inhalation after exhalation... Sooner or later, your mind will wander from concentrating on the breath to your thoughts, plans, daydreams. This is perfectly normal — that's just what the mind does. It is not a mistake or a failure.
- When you notice that your awareness is no longer on the breath, congratulate yourself for becoming aware of it—you can notice briefly where the mind went—and then gently bring the awareness back to concentrating on the breath, all the physical sensations in the lower belly, the changes between the exhalation and the inhalation, whatever you find.
- You will often notice that your mind wanders — and that will happen again and again. As best you can, congratulate yourself each time for reconnecting with your experience of the moment, gently bringing the attention back to the breath, and simply continue to notice the fluctuating physical sensations that accompany each inhalation and each exhalation. As best you can, treat yourself with kindness and compassion, seeing the repeated wanderings of the mind as opportunities to train your attention and to offer patience and compassionate curiosity to your experience.
- You can also become aware of your breath by turning your attention to the sensations in your whole body as you breathe in and out. As best you can, try to be aware of your whole body, and of your breath coming and going freely throughout your body. You may feel as if your whole body is breathing...
- Out of the four places from which you can observe your breath—the nose, the rib cage, the abdomen and the whole body—choose the one that best enables you to become aware of your breath as often as you wish.
- Continue the exercise for as long as you like, reminding yourself from time to time that the only intention is to be aware of your experience of each moment, as best you can, using the breath as an anchor to gently reconnect with the here and now whenever you notice that your mind has wandered and is no longer focused on your breath.