

Meditation on the Breath

Sit in a chair with the spine straight and supported and the feet flat on the floor. Or, you may lie down flat on your back.

Do a simple check-in of your emotional state, your thoughts, and what you are feeling in your body. Just notice what is happening, without judgment or expectation.

Let your body begin to relax, consciously releasing tension. Begin to follow the breath. The stance for meditation and relaxation is always compassionate and curious, never judgmental or rigid. Notice the sensations as you take a breath in through your nose, inhale it through your throat, and into the lungs. Notice the sensations as the lungs expand to full capacity. Hold the breath for a moment, and notice how that feels. Then exhale slowly and completely, through the lips, and notice the release of tension in the lungs and rib cage. Pause briefly again before taking the next breath. Now, just allow your breathing be natural. Focus your attention on the subtle sensations of breathing.

If you like, you may imagine that you are sending warm, healing energy to every cell in your body with every in-breath, and washing away tension, pain and left over emotions with each out-breath. Just allow yourself to relax into each breath.

Your mind will probably wander after a few breaths. As thoughts intrude on your breath mindfulness, just notice them, label them as thoughts, and allow them to pass by unexplored, as if you were idly watching clouds float through a summer sky. Each time your attention wanders, just notice that and return your focus gently to your breath.

If you like, you may add a "mantra" to this breath meditation. For example, on the in-breath you may silently say the word "CALM" and on the out-breath, the word "CLEAR" (any combination you choose that suggests relaxation and letting go is fine). Just continue to breathe, slow deep breaths, in through the nose and out through the lips, focusing on the sensations, and returning to the breath each time the mind wanders.

Practicing this breath meditation has many advantages. Deep abdominal breaths cue the autonomic nervous system to relax. It is a very simple and effective way to relax the body quickly. It also allows you to notice what is happening in your body. It is helpful to discipline the mind to focus on a neutral or pleasant subject, rather than allowing it to be dominated by unpleasant, intrusive thoughts. Over time, you will gradually learn to focus and quiet your mind and calm your body by following your breath.