

Mindfulness Exercises

Breath Awareness Meditation Mindfulness Exercise

Purpose/Effects

Stress is an extremely unhealthy condition. It causes the body to release the chemical cortisol, which has been shown to reduce brain and organ function, among many other dangerous effects. Modern society inadvertently encourages a state of almost continuous stress in people.

This is a meditation that encourages physical and mental relaxation, which can greatly reduce the effects of stress on the body and mind.

Exercise

- Take a reposed, seated posture. Your back should be straight and your body as relaxed as possible.
- Close your eyes and bring your attention to your breathing process. Simply notice you are breathing. Do not attempt to change your breath in any way. Breath simply and normally.
- Try to notice both the in breath and the out breath; the inhale and the exhale. “Notice” means to actually feel the breathing in your body with your body. It is not necessary to visualize your breathing or to think about it in any way except to notice it with your somatic awareness.
- Each time your attention wanders from the act of breathing, return it to noticing the breath. Do this gently and without judgment.
- Remember to really feel into the act of breathing.

Long Version

If you want to go more deeply into this, concentrate on each area of breathing in turn. Here is an example sequence:

1. Notice how the air feels moving through your nostrils on both the in breath and the out breath.
2. Notice how the air feels moving through your mouth and throat. You may feel a sort of slightly raspy or ragged feeling as the air moves through your throat. This is normal and also something to feel into.

3. Notice how the air feels as it fills and empties your chest cavity. Feel how your rib cage rises slowly with each in breath, and gently deflates with each out breath.

4. Notice how your back expands and contracts with each breath. Feel it shifting and changing as you breathe.

5. Notice how the belly expands outward with each in breath and pulls inward with each in breath. Allow your attention to fully enter the body sensation of the belly moving with each breath.

6. Now allow your attention to cover your entire body at once as you breathe in and out. Closely notice all the sensations of the body as it breathes.

- Repeat this sequence over and over, giving each step your full attention as you do it.
- Suggested time is at least 10 minutes. Thirty minutes is better, if you are capable of it.

Three Good Things Mindfulness Exercise

Purpose/Effects

The Three Good Things exercise is intended to increase happiness and a sense of wellbeing.

It does this by a simple method of redirecting attention towards positive thoughts and away from negative thoughts. Human beings have evolved to spend much more time thinking about negative experiences than positive ones. We spend a lot of time thinking about what has gone wrong and how to fix it, or how to do it differently next time. In the past, there may have been an evolutionary advantage to this way of thinking, since it seems to be innate. However, for modern humans this negative bias is the source of a lot of anxiety, depression, and general lack of wellbeing.

Luckily, by re-directing our thoughts on purpose towards positive events, we can do a lot to correct this negative bias.

Exercise

Each night before you go to sleep:

1. Think of three good things that happened today.
2. Write them down.
3. Reflect on why they happened.

Long Version

This exercise is to be done each night before going to sleep.

- Step 1: Think about anything good that happened to you today. It can be anything at all that seems positive to you. It need not be anything big or important. For example, you might recall the fact that you enjoyed the oatmeal you had for breakfast. On the other hand, you might also recall that your child took its first step today. Anything from the most mundane to the most exalted works, as long as it seems to you like a good, positive, happy thing.
- Step 2: Write down these three positive things.
- Step 3: Reflect on why each good thing happened. Determining the “why” of the event is the most important part of the exercise. For example, you might say that your oatmeal tasted really good this morning because your partner took the time to go shopping at the local farmer’s market, where they have fresh, organic oatmeal. Or you might say that your child took its first step today because God was pouring blessings down upon your family, or because it really wanted to get to some cookies on the table. You get to decide reasons for each event that make sense to you.