

Audio Exercise 5: Breathing Mindfulness

The purpose of this exercise is to simply notice, accept and be aware of your breath – it is not about relaxation or stress reduction, although this may well occur. Breathing is something we all do – if you have a pulse then you breathe. Your body knows how to do this; it has done it since birth. This is simply about breathing mindfully. Breathing is something you carry with you everywhere; you are just not usually aware of it.

Sit quietly in a chair with both feet on the ground and your hands in your lap. Allow yourself to feel centred in the chair. Bring all of your attention to the physical act of breathing. Start to notice the breath as it enters your body through your nose and travels to your lungs. Notice with curiosity whether the inward and outward breaths are cool or warm, and notice where the breath travels as it enters and departs.

Also notice the breath as your lungs relax and you inhale through your nose. Don't try to do anything with your breathing – simply notice it, pay attention to it and be aware of it. It doesn't matter if your breathing is slow or fast, deep or shallow; it just is what it is. Allow your body to do what it does naturally.

You will start to notice that each time you breathe in, your diaphragm or stomach will expand... and each time you breathe out your diaphragm or stomach will relax. Again, don't try to do anything – just be aware of the physical sensations of breathing in and breathing out. If you find that thoughts intrude, this is okay. Don't worry, just notice the thoughts, allow them to be, and gently bring your awareness back to your breath.

Start this exercise initially for 5 minutes, building up daily. You can also do this exercise lying down in bed if you have difficulty sleeping. It is simply a way of allowing you to have more mindful and conscious awareness of your body and its surroundings, its breathing and its capacity to relax. When our breathing relaxes our muscles relax.