

Mindfulness of breathing

The aim of this meditation practice is to improve the ability of the mind to concentrate whilst at the same time becoming more relaxed. For the best effects, it is recommended to meditate every day. A little and often is the best approach, maybe just 15 or 20 minutes a day to start with. It helps to develop a rhythm to your practice, a regular time, a special place, accompanied by any little rituals like lighting a stick of incense.

To begin with, switch off your mobile phone and resolve not to answer the doorbell. Find a way to sit that is both comfortable and upright, alert and relaxed. Give your mind some time to unwind, the amount of time needed can vary on different days. With time, bring more and more of your attention to your body and its sensations. Look to find, and enjoy, those subtle movements in the body caused by the process of breathing.

1. In the first stage of the practice, focus your attention on each inhalation and exhalation, and place a count at the end of each out-breath. Breathe in, breathe out, count one, in, out, ... two, ... until ten, and then start again at one. Keep the numbers small and quiet, and look to place them exactly at the end of each out-breath. Look to find a natural rhythm to your breathing without trying to control it. If you have placed a watch in front of you, you can decide to meditate a certain number of minutes per stage.
2. In the second stage, count now at the beginning of each in-breath. Familiarise yourself with the changeover between each out-breath and in-breath. This stage will require a little more precision. If at any time you notice your mind has wandered away from the breathing, don't worry, simply begin again with the count at one.
3. In the third stage, cease the counting and just remain conscious of the breathing. Expand the range of your awareness of the process of breathing, and then look to focus upon an area that is interesting and thus will help you deepen your concentration.
4. In the fourth stage, bring your attention to the first point, on the tip of your nose or on your lips, where you can feel the air as it enters and leaves the body. This requires a still more refined awareness. Look to enjoy the cool, refreshing sensations of each in-breath, and the warmth of each out-breath.

After the end of the practice take a little time to gently come out of meditation, come back to the experience of your body, listen to the noises outside of your room, and open your eyes to the world around you. Take pleasure to live with a mind that is more focused, aware and relaxed.