



A Beacon Health Options website

Practicing Mindfulness

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A wonderful tool for relaxation is simply to breathe and notice your thoughts and surroundings through mindfulness.

Getting started

The first step for mindfulness is to tune in to this moment, right now. Focus on some of the following items below. Don't judge them as good or bad. You don't have to change them either, or worry about them—just notice them.

- **Your breathing.** Is it fast or slow? Deep or shallow?
- **Your body.** What is your posture right now? Is anything tense or uncomfortable?
- **Your surroundings.** What do your senses notice at this moment?
- **Your thoughts.** What thoughts run through your mind?
- **Your feelings.** What emotions are you feeling?

Breathing

As you notice your breathing, you can add an exercise for deeper relaxation:

- Breathe abdominally—your belly expands as you inhale and flattens as you exhale.
- Inhale through the nose quietly for a slow count of five.
- Hold your breath for a slow count of five.
- Exhale through the mouth through pursed lips for a slow count of five.
- Do this several times and pay attention to changes in your body, thoughts, and feelings.

Thinking

Just like breathing, thinking is another function of the body that you can notice passively. And just like breathing, thinking can be managed with exercises. Here are some suggestions:

- As you sit and observe your thoughts, picture them flowing through your mind like leaves floating down a stream.
- If a persistent negative thought bothers you, inhale and picture the breath going into your mind, wrapping itself around the thought. Exhale and imagine the thought leaving with your breath. End with a new thought such as "Let it go."

Practice, practice, practice

You may find it difficult to tune in to the present moment at first. Rather than wait to practice mindfulness when you are upset, tune in to your surroundings when you are calm. The more you practice, the easier it will be to apply these exercises when you need them most.

Resources

Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming the Present Moment and Your Life by Jon Kabat-Zinn. Sounds True, 2012.

Mindfulness: An Eight-Week Plan for Finding Peace in a Frantic World by Mark Williams and Danny Penman. Rodale Books, 2012.

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