

Try these exercises to bring yourself into a more mindful state.

## **Breathing Exercises**

Taking deep breaths can increase a sense of calm and contentment. When people experience anxiety, they take quick, shallow breaths. When they are feeling calm, breathing slows, and blood pressure and heart rate drop.

### **Belly Breathing**

Try *belly breathing* when experiencing a stressful situation such as waiting at the doctor's office. Sit upright with your shoulders relaxed. Take one regular breath and notice where it goes: into the chest or abdomen. Inhale through the nose and imagine the air filling the abdomen; exhale. On subsequent breaths, increase the rise of the belly while inhaling more deeply. Repeat as many times as desired.

### **Focused Breathing**

Try *focused breathing* when there is a need to quiet the mind. The back should be flat on the floor or upright in a chair. Begin with a deep belly breath. Inhale while saying a positive word or phrase such as, "I am happy." Exhale and imagine breathing out a negative quality, like stress or anxiety. Visualize breathing in a soothing color, or count while breathing in. In on 1, out on 2 up to 10 times, and then repeat the sequence. Do this for at least 5 minutes.

### **Alternate-Nostril Breathing**

Try *alternate-nostril breathing* first thing in the morning or after a workout. Sit comfortably in a chair or on the floor. Bring the right hand up to the nose. Using the thumb, gently hold the right nostril closed, and inhale through the left nostril. Release the thumb, hold the left nostril closed with the ring finger, and then exhale through the right nostril. Now inhale through the right nostril, release the ring finger, close the right nostril with the thumb, and breathe out through the left nostril. Keep your head in neutral position. Start with 5 back-and-forth rounds and work up to 10.

## **Mindfulness Meditation**

*Mindfulness meditation* is a method for practicing mindfulness. It is a time to sit quietly, empty the mind, and have a feeling of inner peace. Meditation involves sitting and observing without judgment. This may sound simple but can be challenging in practice.

Meditation practice involves observing thoughts, feelings, and sensation without focusing on them. In meditation, one learns to let the natural inner activity of the mind and body continue on while watching emotions, thoughts, and sensations come and go. Through regular practice, meditators learn distress tolerance through letting go of the struggle with their internal experiences.

Use the following guidelines to get started.

- Sit in a comfortable position.
- Close the eyes or focus on a spot.
- Mentally scan the body for tension.
- Breathe slowly, simply watching each breath come in and go out of the body.
- Repeat a mantra if desired.

If distracted, which is normal and inevitable, bring attention back to the breath. Other types of mindfulness practice include

- Yoga
- Walking meditation
- Mindfully engaging in daily activities
- Prayer

#### Reference

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Public Health. (2011, July). *Mindfulness exercise*. Retrieved March 7, 2019, from <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/>