



Breath Awareness Meditation

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.

METHOD

Summary

Sit still and pay close attention to your breathing process.

Long Version

- 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. Breathe 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.

Date / Time So far today, have you brought kind awareness to your:

Thoughts? Heart? Body? None of the Above





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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 breath.
 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 breath 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.

HISTORY

Breath awareness is probably the oldest meditation technique, and is certainly the most universally known. It can be found, for example, in the Anapanasati Sutta, a scripture which summarizes the Buddha's teaching on breath awareness mediation. Anapanasati means "breath awareness meditation in Pali. The Buddha had learned the basic technique from his own teachers, which means that it existed at least as far back as 500 BCE, although it was probably already ancient at the time.





CAUTIONS

If you have any difficulties breathing, you should work with a qualified instructor.

NOTES

1. If you find yourself distracted by a lot of mental chatter, you can use verbal labeling as an aid to concentration.
2. For example, on the in breath, mentally say to yourself, "Breathing in." On the out breath, say, "Breathing out."
3. Another possibility is to mentally count each breath.

