

# MINDFULNESS FOCUS ON YOUR BREATH MEDITATION

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In mindfulness meditation, we're learning how to pay attention to your breath as it goes in and out, and notice when the mind wanders from this task.

This practice of returning to the breath builds the muscles of attention and mindfulness.

When we pay attention to our breath, we are learning how to return to, and remain in, the present moment, to anchor ourselves in the here and now on purpose, without judgement.

Meditation is something everyone can do. Give it a try.

## How to meditate

Meditation is simpler than most people think.

**1) Take a seat.** Find place to sit that feels calm and quiet to you.

**2) Set a time limit.** If you're just beginning, it can help to choose a short time, such as 5 or 10 minutes.

**3) Notice your body.** You can sit in a chair with your feet on the floor, you can sit loosely cross-legged, you can kneel. All are fine. Just make sure you are stable and in a position you can stay in for a while.

**4) Feel your breath.** Follow the sensation of your breath as it goes in and as it goes out.

**5) Notice when your mind has**

**wandered.** Inevitably, your attention will leave the breath and wander to other places. When you get around to noticing that your mind has wandered, simply return your attention to the breath.

**6) Be kind to your wandering mind.** Don't judge yourself or obsess over the content of the thoughts you find yourself lost in. Just come back.

## 7) Close gently

When you're ready, gently lift your gaze (if your eyes are closed, open them). Take a moment and notice any sounds in the environment.

Notice how your body feels right now. Notice your thoughts and emotions.

That's it! That's the practice.





### **Focus is the key**

You focus your attention, your mind wanders, you bring it back, and you try to do it as kindly as possible (as many times as you need to).

### **How much should i meditate?**

Meditation is no more complicated than what we've described above. It is that simple and that challenging. It's also powerful and worth it. The key is to commit to sit every day, even if it's for 5 minutes. Recent research from neuroscientist Amishi Jha discovered that 12 minutes of meditation, 5 days a week can protect and strengthen your ability to pay attention.

### **Meditation tips and techniques**

We've gone over the basic breath meditation so far, but there are other mindfulness techniques that use different focal points than the breath to anchor our attention. But all of these practices have one thing in common: We notice that our minds ARE running the show a lot of the time. It's true. We think thoughts, typically, and then we act. But here are some helpful strategies to change.

### **Make mindfulness a habit**

It's estimated that 95% of our behaviour runs on autopilot. That's because neural networks underlie all of our habits, reducing our millions of sensory inputs per second into manageable shortcuts so we can function in this crazy world. These default brain signals are so efficient that they often cause us to relapse into old behaviours before we remember what we meant to do instead. Mindfulness is the exact opposite of these default processes. It's executive control rather than autopilot, and enables intentional actions, willpower, and decisions. But that takes practice. The more we activate the intentional brain, the stronger it gets. Every time we do something deliberate and new, we stimulate neuroplasticity, activating our grey matter, which is full of newly sprouted neurons that have not yet been groomed for "autopilot" brain.

### **Strengthen your brain**

While our intentional brain knows what is best for us, our autopilot brain causes us to shortcut our way through life. So how can we trigger ourselves to be mindful when we need it most? This is where the

notion of "behavior design" comes in. It's a way to put your intentional brain in the driver's seat. There are two ways to do that. First, slowing down the autopilot brain by putting obstacles in its way, and second, removing obstacles in the path of the intentional brain, so it can gain control. Shifting the balance to give your intentional brain more power takes some work, though. Here are some ways to get started. You could try a series of "If this, then that" messages to create easy reminders to shift into the intentional brain. For instance, you might come up with, "If office door, then deep breath," as a way to shift into mindfulness as you are about to start your workday. Or, "If phone rings, take a breath before answering." Each intentional action to shift into mindfulness will strengthen your intentional brain.

