



Mindfulness Tools for Resilience and Well-Being

Breathing

The vagal response reduces stress, heart rate and blood pressure, and stimulates digestion. It's an important part of the parasympathetic nervous system, known as the "rest and digest" system. Certain breathing techniques can be used to indirectly stimulate your vagus nerve, relieving anxiety and depression. Vagal nerve stimulation also counteracts the sympathetic nervous system, which causes stress by activating your fight, flight, and freeze response. Vagal nerve stimulation releases an array of anti-stress enzymes and hormones such as acetylcholine, prolactin, vasopressin, and oxytocin and is associated with benefits such as improved memory, immune function, sleep, and higher levels of growth hormone. It also may help tame inflammation, allergic responses, and tension headaches. Mindfulness and compassion meditation practices also activate the parasympathetic system.

1 Controlled deep breathing

- ▶ Inhale, fill your lungs fully, hold for a second or two, and then exhale in a relaxed way.
- ▶ Try breathing in this way for ONE minute.

2 Belly breathing

- ▶ This technique involves expanding your diaphragm, a muscle located horizontally between the chest cavity and stomach cavity (expands the abdomen instead of the chest).
- ▶ Start by taking a deep inhalation into your belly while counting to five; then very slowly exhale while pursing your lips. To get into a vagus-nerve stimulation mode, it's best to reduce the number of breaths from a typical 10-14 per minute to 5-7 per minute.

3 4-7-8 breathing (great for falling asleep)

- ▶ **Get into a comfortable position** seated with hands on lap or lying down.
- ▶ **Breathe in deeply** through your nose for **4** seconds.
- ▶ **Hold your breath** for **7** seconds.
- ▶ **Breathe out slowly** through your mouth for **8** seconds.
- ▶ **Repeat the cycle** for three or more breathing cycles, in a row. You can gradually increase the number of cycles. The general advice is not to do more than 10 in a row. If you feel lightheaded when you start, that's common. It will pass as your body adjusts to the technique.

Mindfulness and Compassion: Guided Meditations and Instructions

UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center (MARC) has a collection of excellent mindfulness meditations (www.bit.ly/1JAfqmk) that are free to use and download.

MARC also offers a Mindfulness Awareness Practices (MAP's) class online (www.bit.ly/22hK0s0). This is a great way to learn the basics and begin to change the structure of your brain for greater ease and resilience in the face of stress. This format affords the scheduling flexibility you may need, with the ability to listen as you're able.

The Center for Mindful Self-Compassion offers a wonderful collection of guided practices (www.bit.ly/1heW888) to support us during times of stress and anxiety. These practices bring many benefits including calming the brain and the body's threat system when it "takes over" and pushes us into fight, flight, and freeze.

Tara Brach, Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology, offers a broad collection of guided mindfulness and compassion meditations: www.bit.ly/20u2uFa.

Mindfulness of Breath, Body, Sound

- ▶ **12 minute body and breath scan:** www.bit.ly/254sN7b (Tara Brach)
- ▶ **5 minute breath:** www.bit.ly/1Tiy2hl (Contemplative Mind Society)
- ▶ **12 minute, breath, sound body:** www.bit.ly/1fn3Rm3 (UCLA MARC)
- ▶ **19 minutes, basic mindfulness meditation instruction:** www.bit.ly/1QgIkJA (UCLA MARC)

Body Scan

Scanning the body is a great way to release tension that's built up in the body, tension we often don't recognize.

Here is a collection of different guided body scan meditations to try:

- ▶ Guided body scan you can do before you go to sleep: www.bit.ly/22TPKqJ
- ▶ 20-minute guided body scan: www.bit.ly/1NBbarh (Steven Hickman)
- ▶ 45-minute guided body scan: www.bit.ly/1OQenDD (Lois Howland)

Labeling

While there are full periods of meditation that can be devoted to this technique, it can also be used on the spot or during formal meditation practice. It's very helpful when the mind and body struggle with focus and settling. All that's required is to label your experience. "tension... sadness... hunger... frustration... tightness... future (thinking forward in time)... regret... agitation..." This type of labeling shifts you into metacognition, loosening the tendency we have to be overly identified and as a result, caught in reactivity and story.

R.A.I.N. Meditation

- ▶ Eight minute introduction to the technique and brief practice: www.bit.ly/1WfVupl (Tara Brach)
- ▶ 35-minute introduction to the technique and brief practice: www.bit.ly/23Zepe0 (Tara Brach)

S.T.O.P.

STOP (for stress, or...), to be used on the spot, when we feel stress or any kind of strong emotion or challenge becomes "sticky" or takes over our mind and our experience. This can be done on your own or actively in a group, when stress and tension become evident and interfere with the group's productivity.

- #1: Stop
- #2: Take a breath
- #3: Observe without judgement and with kind attention
 - Body sensations
 - Thoughts
 - Emotions (shared humanity)
- #4: Proceed

Mindfulness Apps

Apps that are worthy of your attention: www.http://bit.ly/1LjLbx

Mindfulness Training App (www.apple.co/27FXRfQ; available for iPhone)

This app gives you a sampling of teachings from key mindfulness instructors, including Jon Kabat-Zinn (www.bit.ly/1qxGXOq), the pioneer of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Jack Kornfield (www.bit.ly/1Oxrg5l), Tara Brach (www.bit.ly/1UdzJYo), and others. This is a great app for beginning meditators. Seasoned practitioners may appreciate talks on the science of mindfulness and happiness.

HeadSpace (www.bit.ly/1rLJ3Zt), spearheaded by meditation teacher Andy Puddicombe. This slickly designed app provides ten-minute meditation sessions, with the first ten days available free of charge. If you've never tried meditation, Andy's easy banter and relatable instruction will make the practice more accessible. You might find that it takes you more than ten days to get through the first ten practices.

Insight Timer (www.bit.ly/1k97Jsk), a meditation timer that doubles as a mindfulness guide. Users can share their meditation times with their friends and check in on others users meditating in the area. But readers come for the guided meditations hosted on the app, from well-known teachers like Sharon Salzberg (www.bit.ly/27G0372), Tara Brach, and Jack Kornfield.

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