

## Mindfulness Meditation Instructions (Breath Focus)

'Mindfulness' means embracing present moment experience. Mindfulness meditation is a powerful, scientifically-validated technique for balancing the mind and for increasing awareness of the mind/body link. Among other things, it is used for stress and pain management, calming an overactive mind and enhancing concentration and sensory experience.

There are two basic types: **breath focus**, involving focussing attention on the sensations of breath, and **body scan**, involving focussing on sensations occurring throughout the whole body. Here I concentrate on the breath focus, which tends to be taught as the introductory technique.

### Posture

The goal of meditation is to remove external distractions in order to amplify awareness of internal experience (thoughts, emotions and physical sensations). Meditation is a bit like sensory deprivation in this respect. Ensure the following:

- Find a quiet place free of interruptions
- Adopt a posture that you can sustain for the duration of the session. Sitting on the ground with a cushion is ideal but a chair is also fine. A straight spine aids concentration and is also beneficial for your body. Lying down is acceptable, but encourages drowsiness
- Rest your hands comfortably in your lap either clasped or unclasped
- Close your eyes to avoid visual distractions
- Maintain **complete stillness** throughout, except for the movements of breath

### Duration and frequency

Pre-determine the length of time you will meditate and adhere to this with determination. Any time of day is fine. Use a countdown alarm to let you know when the time is up. I recommend starting with a few minutes and gradually extending this just as you would with physical exercise. 20-30min is a reasonable goal to build up to.

## The two basic instructions

### 1<sup>st</sup> instruction

Pay attention to the sensations of respiration that occur at a specific part of your body, such as where the air enters and leaves the nostrils or where your stomach rises and falls. Choose one focal point or the other but do not switch between the two throughout the session. Importantly, you are *not* attempting to alter the nature of the breath in any way (such as by breathing deeply). Just observe the breath as it is.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> instruction

When you notice that your attention has strayed from the focal point (e.g. you've had an idea, memory, feeling or perception) simply return your attention to your breath as many times as necessary.

**Note:** The most prevalent misconception about mindfulness meditation is that the practice itself is supposed to be relaxing or enjoyable. Meditation is for mental training and is no more or less likely to be relaxing or enjoyable than physical exercise. Success should be measured not by how relaxing or enjoyable the experience is, or how few times your mind wanders, but rather by your dedication to practice. As with physical training, benefits are inevitable through practice. Any challenges you experience during meditation reveal something about your psychology in general and can be explored in depth in counselling.