

Deep Breathing



Deep Breathing: a relaxation technique performed by taking slow, deep breaths. When practiced regularly, deep breathing provides immediate and long-term relief from stress.

How Deep Breathing Works

During periods of anxiety, the body triggers a set of symptoms called the **stress response**. Breathing becomes shallow and rapid, heart rate increases, and muscles become tense. In opposition to the stress response is the **relaxation response**. Breathing becomes deeper and slower, and the symptoms of anxiety fade away. Deep breathing triggers this response.

Instructions

Sit back or lie down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes, if you would like to do so. When you're learning, try placing a hand on your stomach. If you breathe deeply enough, you should notice it rising and falling with each inhalation and exhalation.



Inhale: Breathe in slowly through your nose for 4 seconds

Pause: Hold the air in your lungs for 4 seconds.

Exhale: Breathe out slowly through your mouth for 6 seconds (Pucker your lips to slow down).

Repeat.: Practice for at least 2 minutes, but preferably 5 to 10 minutes.

Tips

If it isn't working, *slow down!* The most common mistake is breathing too fast. Time each step in your head, counting slowly as you do so.

Counting out your breaths serves a second purpose. It takes your mind off the source of your anxiety. Whenever you catch your mind wandering, simply return your focus to counting.

The times we use for each step are suggestions, and can be lengthened or decreased. Lengthen the time if it feels natural to do so, or decrease the time if you feel discomfort.

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Leaves on a Stream: Mindfulness Exercise

Overview

During the **leaves on a stream** exercise, you will visualize yourself resting near a stream. When thoughts enter your mind, you will imagine placing them atop a leaf, and watching them float away. Instead of seeing the world from “inside” your thoughts, take a step back and view them from afar. By doing so, you will gain perspective on your thoughts and feelings, reducing their power.

Getting Started

- Find a quiet place, free of distractions.
- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.
- Close your eyes or let your gaze soften.
- Begin taking slow, deep breaths.

Instructions

Visualize

Imagine you are resting by the side of a stream. This scene can look however you like. Use all your senses to imagine what the stream and its surroundings look like, the sound of the water and other ambiance, the physical sensations, and anything else that comes to mind.

Meditate

Your objective is to focus on the stream. When distractions enter your mind, such as thoughts or feelings, take a moment to notice them without judgment. For example, if you are distracted by other obligations, notice and acknowledge to yourself: “I am thinking about my to-do list.”

Manage Your Thoughts

After taking a moment to observe a thought or feeling, return your attention to the stream. Place your thought upon a leaf. You might imagine writing the thought on the leaf or attaching it in some other way. Place the leaf in the water and watch it float down the stream until it disappears.

Practice

Continue visualizing the stream, observing and releasing thoughts that enter your mind. There is nothing else you need to do. Set a timer for 10-15 minutes to know when practice concludes.

Notes

Treat all of your thoughts and feelings the same, whether comfortable, uncomfortable, or neutral. The goal is to become aware of your experience—not to change or improve it.

With practice, the leaves on a stream exercise will become easier, and its effects more powerful.

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