

Mindfulness of Breathing Meditation

Our acts of voluntary attending, as brief and fitful as they are, are nevertheless momentous and critical, determining us as they do, to higher or lower destinies.

William James

In this practice, you engage in being in a calm, relaxed and alert state of mind through attending to the sensations of your natural breathing – you simply notice the sensations without trying to alter your breathing in any way. If at any time your attention wanders away from the sensations you gently bring it back.

Traditionally the Mindfulness of Breathing meditation is done in four stages. Initially, you would take about five minutes per stage; later this might be increased to about ten minutes per stage.

In the first couple of stage counting is used as an aid to staying on track in attending to the sensations of the breathing: in the first stage counting **after** each in-and-out breath, and in the second stage counting **before** each in-and-out breath.

In the third stage you drop the counting and continue attending to the sensations of your breathing.

In the fourth stage you settle your attention on the sensation at the point where the breath enters and leaves the body – usually around the tip of the nose, but sometimes in the mouth or at the back of the throat.

1st stage

Breathing naturally, count *after* each out-breath in sets of 10 in-and-breaths, over and over. So it goes:

breathe in, then out, and count 1;
breathe in, then out, and count 2;
breathe in, then out, and count 3;
etc. up to: in, out 10,
and then in, out, 1 again...

If your attention wanders away from the breathing gently bring it back and begin counting at one again.

2nd stage

Count *before* each in-breath. There is a subtle difference here in the quality of attention as it now involves some anticipation. As in stage one, count in cycles of 10 breaths:

count 1, breathe in and out;
count 2, breathe in and out;
etc. all the way to 10, in, out
and then back to 1, in, out...

If your attention wanders away from the breathing gently bring it back and begin counting at one again.

3rd stage

Drop the counting and continue attending to the sensations of the breathing.

4th stage

Now shift your attention to the sensation at the point where the air enters and leaves your body. For example, you might feel a slight coolness where the air first enters the nose, simply keep your attention at this one point.