

Multifaith Chaplaincy

MEDITATION - THE GENTLE STRESSBUSTER

What is Meditation?

Meditation is the process of getting beyond the busy-ness of the 'thinking' mind into a state of relaxation and awareness. Though a component of many religious traditions, meditation does not have to be connected with religion. Meditation techniques are simple to describe but they do require perseverance. That said, the benefits can be considerable.

Benefits of Meditation

Many people meditate because of its positive impact in their lives. Some benefits are described below:

- **Reduces tension and promotes relaxation.** Meditation is increasingly being recognised as a stress-reducer when practised regularly. The calm mental state experienced during meditation also tends to carry over into everyday life. Similarly, the physical relaxation experienced through meditation results in less muscular tension on a day-to-day basis.
- **Improves concentration.** During meditation, attention is focused on one particular thing, concentrating in a relaxed manner (rather than straining to hold our attention). This practice in concentration can also help us to concentrate more easily in other areas of our life.
- **Improves self-awareness.** While our mind is quiet during meditation, it is easier to notice things about ourselves that we otherwise miss. We become more aware of our physical and mental state.

A Simple Meditation Technique

Start by preparing yourself. Ask others not to disturb you for the next ten minutes, and turn off the TV, radio, and phone. Sit up, either on a firm chair or on the floor. (Lying down or slouching will encourage you to sleep rather than meditate.)

Close your eyes, and relax your body. Now start to count your breaths. Count from one to nine and then start again at one. Continue for five minutes to start with. (As you get better at holding your concentration, you can gradually increase the time). Don't worry if you do get caught up in a thought - when you notice this happening, simply acknowledge the thought and just start counting again from one.

After five minutes stop counting and watch your breath for a few repetitions, then slowly open your eyes. Try to maintain a sense of peace for as long as possible by not throwing yourself back into a hectic environment immediately!

Source: Macbeth, J. (2002). *Moon Over Water*, Newleaf.

Further advice and information available from the Multifaith Chaplaincy

To find out more, please get in touch with the Sheffield Hallam Multifaith Chaplaincy. You can talk with one of our chaplains or faith advisors. We can also point you in the direction of further resource material.

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See next page for a 'Mindfulness' meditation exercise

MINDFULNESS OF BREATHING

SETTLING

1. Settle into a comfortable sitting position, either on a straight-backed chair or on a soft surface on the floor with your bottom supported by cushions or on a low stool or meditation bench. If you use a chair, sit away from the back of the chair so that your spine is in a self-supporting, comfortable posture. Have your feet flat on the floor with legs uncrossed. If you sit on the floor experiment with the height of the cushions or stool until you feel comfortable.
2. Gently close your eyes if that feels comfortable. If not, let your gaze fall unfocused on the floor four or five feet in front of you.

BRINGING AWARENESS TO THE BODY

3. Bring your awareness to the level of physical sensations by focusing your attention on the sensations of touch, contact, and pressure in your body where it makes contact with the floor and with whatever you are sitting on. Spend a minute or two exploring these sensations.

FOCUSING ON THE SENSATIONS OF BREATHING

4. Now bring your awareness to the changing patterns of physical sensations in the belly as the breath moves in and out of the body.
5. Focus your awareness on the mild sensations of stretching as the abdominal wall gently expands with each in-breath and on the sensations of gentle release as the abdominal wall deflates with each outbreath. Do your best to stay in touch with the changing physical sensations in your abdomen for the full duration of the in-breath and the full duration of the out-breath, noticing the slight pauses between an in-breath and the following out-breath and between an out-breath and the following in-breath. As an alternative, if you prefer, focus on a place in the body where you find the sensations of the breath most vivid and distinct (such as the nostrils).
6. There is no need to try to control your breathing in any way—simply let your body breathe by itself. As best you can, also bring this attitude of allowing to the rest of your experience - there is nothing that needs to be fixed, and no particular state to be achieved. As best you can, simply surrender to your experience as it is without requiring that it be any different.

WORKING WITH THE MIND WHEN IT WANDERS

7. Inevitably the mind will wander during your meditation, getting caught up in thoughts, planning, or daydreams, or just aimlessly drifting about. This is OK! Such wandering and getting absorbed in things is simply what minds do; it is not a mistake or a failure. When this happens you might like to briefly acknowledge where the mind has been. Then, gently escorting your attention back to the breath sensations in your body, as you bring awareness to the feeling of this in-breath or this out-breath, whichever is here as you return. Simply repeat this each time your mind wanders.
8. As best you can, bring a quality of kindness to your awareness, perhaps seeing the repeated wanderings of the mind as opportunities to cultivate greater patience and acceptance within yourself and some compassion toward your experience.
9. Continue with the practice for ten minutes, or longer if you wish, perhaps reminding yourself from time to time that the intention is simply to be aware of your experience moment by moment, as best you can, using the breath as an anchor to gently reconnect with the here and now each time that you notice that the mind has wandered off and is no longer in touch with the abdomen, in touch with this very breath in this very moment.