

## Mindful Breathing Activity – Concept

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### Overview

All kinds of things can hinder or obscure a sense of inner peace. Whether a serious matter like conflict with a loved one, or a more minor inconvenience like being stuck in traffic, when things don't go our way, we don't like it!

In Mindful Stress Reduction, techniques with origin in the ancient practices of conscious meditation the concept of “The Five Hindrances” sheds light on what gets in the way of us feeling as peaceful as possible and making healthy choices, regardless of the circumstances we face. The Five Hindrances is another westernized typology of framework in which it is believed that - **sensory desire, anger & aversion, restlessness & worry, sloth & torpor and doubt** – refer to the key mental states that stir up our body and mind in ways that can lead to emotional or behavioral difficulties.

While this framework's original intent was to explore hindrances to the practice of meditation, the principles can be applied to everyday life. The point of this theory isn't to minimize the difficulties and stress that are unavoidable in life; rather, it's to help us work more effectively with them.

### Objectives

Gain full acceptance without judgement of one's feelings, to achieve a state of inner calm and balance.

## 5 Minute Mindful Breathing Activity

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1.) Find a comfortable and stable posture either sitting or lying on your back. Allow your back to be straight but not rigid. Let your arms and hands rest in a relaxed position.

Pause here and after each subsequent step.

2.) Close your eyes, if it feels comfortable. If not, soften your gaze.

3.) Bring your attention to the present moment by noticing how you're feeling physically. Scan your body from head to toe and consciously try to let any tension slip away. Take a moment to notice your environment – any sounds you might hear in the background, what the temperature feels like in the room.

4.) After that, bring your attention to your breathing from three vantage points:

–First, notice the sensation of your breath going in/out of your nostrils or mouth.

–Second as your breath occurs, pay attention to the rise/fall of your chest.

–Third, notice the rise/fall of your belly as your breath occurs.

5.) Pick the vantage point that seems to be the easiest for you to focus on. Follow the breath for its full duration, from the start to finish. Notice that the breath happens on its own, without any conscious effort. Some breaths may be slow, some fast, some shallow or deep. You don't need to control the breath, you just need to notice it.

6.) If you find it helpful, you can say "1" to yourself on each in-breath and "2" on each out-breath.

7.) Each time your mind wanders away from the breath (and this will happen many times!), notice where it goes and then gently bring your attention back to the feeling of the breath going in and out.

When the mind wanders, you can make a mental note of it. For example, if you drift away from your breath to thinking about the future, you can say to yourself “planning, planning.” If your mind is pulled to a sensation of pain in your body, you can say to yourself “pain, pain.” Or, if you notice you’re focused on something worrisome from the past, you can say “worry, worry” and then gently bring your attention back to the present moment – noticing the breath.

8.) Your mind may wander hundreds of times or more during these 5 minutes – that’s ok and quite natural! Your “job” is to catch yourself when you’ve wandered and to gently bring your focus back to the breath every time, without judging yourself for how “well” or “poorly” you’re doing the exercise.

9.) Try to practice this exercise for 5 minutes (or longer if you’d like) every day, for at least one week. Notice how it feels to spend some time each day just being with your breath.

Practicing mindful breathing is like strengthening your muscle of living in the present; as you practice more, you’ll find it easier to remain in the here and now, rather than being caught up in the past or in some fantasy about the future.

Living in the “now” tends to feel more peaceful and clear, even when external circumstances are difficult. Mindfulness practice is not a prescription for tuning out the world; rather, it’s about tuning in with open and compassionate awareness. Relating to life from this vantage point not only feels better, but often results in more skillful living.