

Controlled Breathing

Mindfulness Worksheet

Date / Time:

So far today, have you brought kind awareness to your:

Thoughts? Heart? Body? None

To begin this Meditation, please bring kind awareness to

- why you chose this topic
- how your belly, chest, and head each feel when you reflect on this topic
- the emotions that you can associate with these visceral feelings
- the positive or negative impact of any stories you believe in regarding this topic
- the fact that many others are feeling similarly about this topic as you
- how you might feel with increased awareness around this topic
- when you can apply increased mindfulness to this topic in your day-to-day life



The breath carries a wisdom and embodies a force that guides it to nourish us even without our conscious effort. However, stress and anxiety can have us holding or inhibiting the breath in less than beneficial ways. And, while the breath always knows just what to do, we can deliberately guide it for short periods of time to deepen its potential to nourish us.

This exercise involves a simple controlled breathing practice. The pattern is 4-1-4-1 – inhaling for 4 seconds, holding for 1, exhaling for 4, and holding for 1. As you move through this practice, honor the needs of your body if it becomes uncomfortable for you in any way.

PRACTICE:

1. Seated or lying down on your back, place both hands on your belly to help guide the breath into this part of the body. Take five normal breaths first to ground yourself.
2. Begin moving through the 4-1-4-1 rhythm:
 - a. Inhale for 4 seconds,
 - b. Hold at the top for 1 second,
 - c. Exhale for 4 seconds,
 - d. Hold at the bottom for 1 second,
 - e. Begin the cycle again.

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3. As you breathe, invite the breath all the way into the stomach, helping to initiate the body's parasympathetic nervous system. This helps us to ease tension and find greater rest.
4. Breathe in this controlled way for 3-5 minutes or for as long as is comfortable. Depending on your present moment needs, that could be 1 minute or it could be 10. Again, honor the needs of your body.
5. When you are finished, come back to the natural rhythm of the breath. Notice how the mind and body may have shifted during this practice. When you are ready, open your eyes to return to the outside world.

NOTES:

This practice is just one form of controlled breathing. There are various forms of *pranayama* (a Sanskrit term for breath regulation or control) and other non-yogic breathing techniques to explore.

This simple breathing technique can be practiced numerous times throughout the day. It is a wonderful tool to remember for when acute stress arises. For instance, you might practice this regulated breathing for one minute before a test or presentation to help ease the racing mind.

If you feel dizzy or lightheaded while practicing any breathing technique, stop the practice. If you have never practiced controlled breathing exercises before, start with short sessions of 1-2 minutes, lengthening your practice if you feel called to over time.