

One Breath at a Time

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



ONE BREATH A TIME

There's a popular saying in addiction recovery circles: "One day at a time".

This refers to our very human tendency to feel we have to solve all our problems RIGHT NOW. That we think we have to figure out or achieve EVERYTHING. In a nutshell: to be in control of life.

"One day at a time" reminds us that it is impossible to climb a mountain all at once, or even to know what's going to happen 100 feet up.

But taking it step by step makes it a lot more manageable.

It brings us back into the present moment, which, if we're honest with ourselves, is the only place where we have any "control". And that control is not usually about our external situation, but about how we're reacting – or not reacting – to it.



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The beauty of meditation is that it allows us to break life down into even tinier pieces.

When we use our breath as an anchor, bringing us back to the present moment again and again as our minds wander off into problem-solving or fantasizing or worrying, we find a natural, built-in way to be present. In this presence, it's easier to be compassionate to ourselves.

We do this by meditating one breath at a time.

Within this one breath, there is only the here and now.

This breath is a gentle, life-giving reminder that that conversation or presentation we are dreading or rehearsing isn't actually happening right now.

That all we can really do and know is that we are alive, here, now.

This is the place where are.

These are sounds we hear.

This is the sensation of breathing.

Life is much simpler than we believe, but that's so easy to forget when we get overwhelmed.



A teacher of mine likes to say that breathing is a great meditation focus – because it's portable, and free! And we always have access to it.

Anyone who's ever struggled to breathe knows what it feels like to realize they've taken breathing for granted.

Tara Brach says, "**Life is not a problem to be solved.**"

Again, this is so easy to forget. We speed around on autopilot, believing that if we can just get things right, we won't have to suffer.

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And yet, the First Noble Truth of Buddhism is that being alive means we will experience pain. There's no escaping it.

And trying to escape it means we miss out on so much of the beauty of life.

The smell of the fresh air.

Our health.

A loved one we're sitting next to.

The taste and nourishment of the food we're eating.

Even entire good days can slip by us when we're focused on making things better, or different.



If you're focusing on one breath at a time in your meditation, it might help for you to set your timer at intervals – you could 2 minutes, 3 minutes or 5 minutes.

Whenever your timer dings or chimes, you can use this as a reminder to come back to this one breath.

Then this one.

Now this one.

You can remember, again and again, how each breath contains multitudes. Each breath reminds us of the richness of the life we've been given – the richness of sorrow, of gratitude, even of anger. The richness of being a living, breathing being.

Remember: there is a reason meditation is called "practice". We are not accustomed to moving slowly, or to being in the present. Everything in our culture conditions us not to. So it's important to have a great deal of patience and kindness for yourself when you are trying to focus on the breath.

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It can help to say, silently, “One breath at a time.”

Or, “This breath. Now this one. Now this one.”

Or you can use Thich Nhat Hanh’s reminder:

“Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in... breathing out, I know that I am breathing out.”

Anxiety may come up when we are trying to take things one breath at a time.

Shouldn’t I be doing something? What if I fall behind?

Anxiety is not a bad thing! We can use it as a doorway into the present moment. What is it like to breathe with anxiety? One breath? Then another?

Does more anxiety arise? How does that feel?

When we take things one breath at a time, it’s much more manageable than “I must conquer all of my anxiety, AND all of my to do list... before bedtime.”

Taking things one breath at a time, we might also experience relief. To let go of what we’re holding of the future, and the past.

What does this relief feel like?

This breath asks nothing of us. In this moment, there is nothing to “do”.

This meditation reminds us that life is, simply, a series of moments. One after another.

One breath at a time can bring us into our body. It can attune us to feelings we hadn’t noticed we were feeling, whether on a mental or physical level.

And like climbing the mountain one step at a time, it can help us take the experience of that feeling... bit by bit, manageably, one breath at a time.