

Mindfulness Breathing

1. Sit in a comfortable position, with your back straight and let your shoulders drop. It can help you feel grounded if you put your feet flat on the floor and little bit apart.
2. Close your eyes if it feels comfortable or just drop your gaze.
3. Bring your awareness to your body by focusing your attention on the sensations of touch, contact and pressure in your body – so for instance, notice how your feet touch the floor, the feeling of contact between your backside and thighs with your chair or whatever you are sitting on, your fingertips and wherever they lie. Spend a few minutes relaxing into your body. If you feel fidgety, that's ok, fidget and then come back to what you were feeling before.
4. Bring your attention to your belly, feeling it rise or expand gently on the in-breath and fall on the out-breath. Maybe also the rise and fall of your chest or the breath leaving your mouth as you breathe out. This is all about leaving thoughts behind or letting them pass through and being in the present. It is also a way of slowing down your system so that you can refocus when you are ready.
5. Keep the focus on your breathing, "being with" each in-breath for its full duration and with each out-breath for its full duration, as if you were rising and dipping on the waves of your own breathing.
6. Your mind will almost certainly wander – what's for lunch, what are other people doing, that thing you saw on youtube – and that's fine. Every time you notice that your mind has wandered away from your breathing, just notice the thought, let it float off like a cloud and then gently guide your attention back to your belly and the feeling of the breath coming in and out of your body.
7. If your mind wanders from the breath a thousand times, then your "job" is simply bringing it back to the breath every time, no matter what it becomes preoccupied with. It is just as valuable to become aware that your mind has wandered and to bring it back to the breath, as it is to remain aware of the breath.

(Adapted from Jon Kabat-Zinn, Full Catastrophe Living, p. 58)

Three to five minutes is a good start. Focussed breathing is useful as a way of relaxing or as a way of coping with more difficult feelings. It needs practice. If you become comfortable doing it, and don't have to think about it too much, you will be more able to use it when you are in a state of anxiety, depression, panic or crisis.

It is a way of being in the present, rather than projecting forward into the future or being pulled into the past. There's nothing wrong with thinking ahead or reflecting on the past but sometimes – especially in times of stress - this isn't helpful.

There is lots of material on youtube about Mindfulness and Jon Kabat-Zinn in particular.