

Simple Ways to Calm Your Mind

FROM RUSS HARRIS AUTHOR OF *THE HAPPINESS TRAP*

These three exercises are useful to practice several times during the day, especially when you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts and feelings.

Ten Breaths

1. Take ten slow, deep breaths. Focus on breathing out as slowly as possible until the lungs are completely empty—and then allow them to refill by themselves.
2. Notice the sensations of your lungs emptying. Notice them refilling. Notice your rib cage rising and falling. Notice the gentle rise and fall of your shoulders.
3. See if you can let your thoughts come and go as if they're just passing cars, driving past outside your house.
4. Expand your awareness: simultaneously notice your breathing and your body. Then look around the room and notice what you can see, hear, smell, touch, and feel.

Drop Anchor

1. Plant your feet into the floor.
2. Push them down—notice the floor beneath you, supporting you.
3. Notice the muscle tension in your legs as you push your feet down.
4. Notice your entire body—and the feeling of gravity flowing down through your head, spine, and legs into your feet.
5. Now look around and notice what you can see and hear around you. Notice where you are and what you're doing.

Notice Five Things

1. Pause for a moment
2. Look around and notice five things that you can see.
3. Listen carefully and notice five things that you can hear.
4. Notice five things that you can feel in contact with your body (for example, your watch against your wrist, your trousers against your legs, the air on your face, your feet upon the floor, your back against the chair).
5. Finally, do all of the above simultaneously

INFORMAL MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

Here are three easy mindfulness practices you can integrate with your day-to-day activities. No silent meditation required!

1. Mindfulness in Your Morning Routine

Pick an activity that constitutes part of your daily morning routine, such as brushing your teeth, shaving, making the bed, or taking a shower. When you do it, totally focus attention on what you're doing: the body movements, the taste, the touch, the smell, the sight, the sound, and so on. Notice what's happening with an attitude of openness and curiosity.

For example, when you're in the shower, notice the sounds of the water as it sprays out of the nozzle, as it hits your body, and as it gurgles down the drain. Notice the temperature of the water, and the feel of it in your hair, and on your shoulders, and running down your legs. Notice the smell of the soap and shampoo, and the feel of them against your skin. Notice the sight of the water droplets on the walls or shower curtain, the water dripping down your body and the steam rising upward. Notice the movements of your arms as you wash or scrub or shampoo.

When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, and let them come and go like passing cars. Again and again, you'll get caught up in your thoughts. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what the thought was that distracted you, and bring your attention back to the shower.

2. Mindfulness of Domestic Chores

Pick an activity such as ironing clothes, washing dishes, vacuuming floors—something mundane that you have to do to make your life work—and do it mindfully. For example, when ironing clothes, notice the color and shape of the clothing, and the pattern made by the creases, and the new pattern as the creases disappear. Notice the hiss of the steam, the creak of the ironing board, the faint sound of the iron moving over the material. Notice the grip of your hand on the iron, and the movement of your arm and your shoulder.

If boredom or frustration arises, simply acknowledge it, and bring your attention back to the task at hand. When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and bring your attention back to what you're doing. Again and again, your attention will wander. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to your current activity.

3. Mindfulness of Pleasant Activities

Pick an activity you enjoy such as cuddling with a loved one, eating lunch, stroking the cat, playing with the dog, walking in the park, listening to music, having a soothing hot bath, and so on. Do this activity mindfully: engage in it fully, using all five of your senses, and savor every moment. If and when your attention wanders, as soon as you realize it, note what distracted you, and re-engage in whatever you're doing.