



Three-Minute Breathing Meditation: noticing & focusing

Brendan Lloyd PhD, February 2020. r: 02.4

Take three minutes to sit and breathe. Take the opportunity whenever it arises. You could be at your desk, waiting in your car or at a bus stop, sitting at your kitchen table or sitting on a Yoga mat.

Close your eyes and draw your attention to your breath. Become aware of your breath entering and leaving your body. By focusing on your breath, you have your attention in real-time. It's about your focus of attention, not so much your breath.

To help you to focus on your breath make a mental note of your breathing. Do this by saying to yourself "in" on the in-breath and "out" on the out-breath. This is to help you focus your attention.

Make the connection between the meaning of the words "in" and "out" to the coming and going of your breath. Notice on the in-breath how your tummy expands out. Notice on the out-breath how effortless it is to let the breath go. This is natural diaphragmatic breathing.

If at first this is not a natural style of breathing, then do it on purpose. For example, as you breathe-in, push your tummy out; you might need to do it this way to get the knack, particularly if you have a lifetime habit of sucking your tummy in to inhale.

Allow your breathing to settle into a gentle rhythm of "in" then "out", "in" then "out", etc. Focus your attention on the breath, in - out.

There you are in the meditation, focused on your breath. Notice how your mind is prone to wander. When this happens, notice how you lose your connection with your breath. This is your attention wondering off elsewhere. Bring yourself back; focus back to your breath; say the words as you breathe, "in", "out". Bring your attention back to real-time in this way.

Bring your focus back to your breath. How long were you away for? It doesn't matter, it's not a contest; but did you notice that your attention had wandered off elsewhere, that's the point.

It could be that your mind will wander elsewhere up to 20 or so times in the three minutes. It's not a contest to see if you can get it down to zero. That would be missing the point of the meditation. It's all about your focus of attention, as a conscious act.

So, if you find your mind wondering elsewhere 20 times during the three minutes, then you had 20 opportunities to practise returning your attention to real-time. That is a job well done.

If we take longer than expected to return to real-time, this delay will be due to the pull, or the seduction, of the head-chatter. If we dwell with our attention elsewhere, then we're tumbling headlong into the perceptual distortions and half-truths of the head-chatter. Even if the head-chatter seems like a void, take note, and return to your breath – in – out.

In the three-minute meditation we are not trying to focus on the head-chatter. We certainly would not benefit from developing the themes or content of the head-chatter in the three-minute meditation. The breath is the focus. Use your conscious connection to your breath to bring your attention back to real-time. The return to real-time is the mind skill.

Nor are we trying to rid ourselves of the head-chatter by meditating. That idea will eventually prove too frustrating and dissatisfying. What we need, to maintain the process of stress-reduction generally, is to notice the chatter.

In some cases, it might be as simple as noticing the chatter to get you off the emergency button. On other occasions the chatter will be more persistent. No matter how persistent or seductive the head-chatter, the first step is to

notice it and return your attention to real-time.

The point of the three-minute breathing meditation is to practise the noticing and focusing. Now notice the spelling of the word *practise*. It is a verb. It is a doing word. By doing the practise you improve your muscle memory for noticing and focusing. The noticing and focusing is the first step in the process of silencing the chatter as it occurs.

NB: This meditation is described by Kabat-Zinn (1990)ⁱ.

Diaphragmatic breathing

There is also another benefit from this meditation practise. You will also be practising diaphragmatic breathing. As the breath returns to your body notice how your tummy goes out. As your breath leaves your body notice how your tummy goes back in. Aside from the meditation, you can practise this breathing whilst watching TV.

Shallow breathing that occurs up in your chest is more associated with anxiety and panic. Diaphragmatic breathing is less strain on our body and is more associated with relaxation. A case in point is that to breathe out, all you need to do is relax.

You don't really need to breathe out. If you

relax, your breath will simply escape from your body. When you relax, your diaphragm returns to its original position which is in the up position. As your diaphragm relaxes it simply pushes the air out of your lungs.

Resources

In the three-minute meditation you have the opportunity to practise relaxation, diaphragmatic breathing and bringing your attention back to real-time. This is a nice compact meditation and very much worth the time each day; either as a routine or opportunistically.

To make life easier for you, there are resources here for you to tap into.

- [The Skillful Mind Perspective articles.](#)
- [Telehealth couching sessions.](#)

The Skillful Mind articles can be a great self-help resource. Telehealth consultations will speed up your efforts. You probably can do it on your own, but you can lighten the load.

With telehealth consultations your efforts will be solid and sustainable. Phone for an appointment.

[Click here for other Skillful Mind Perspective articles...](#)

ⁱ Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full Catastrophe Living: using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, Pain, and illness*. Delta Trade Paperbacks: New York.