

Three-Minute Breathing Meditation: noticing & focusing

Brendan Lloyd PhD, February 2020. *r*: 02.2

Do this three minute meditation to practise the mind skills of noticing and focusing. The noticing and focusing is at least the first step in the process of letting-go of, or positively disengage from the head-chatter.

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 you 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.

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.

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 sitting, 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 wondered 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 that brings 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 head-chatter. In some cases we may wish to learn from the head-chatter.

In some cases it might be as simple as noticing the head-chatter to get you off the emergency button. On other occasions the head-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. It's the conscious act of bringing your attention back to real-time; that is the mind skill.

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 your tummy goes back in. 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.

In this 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.

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

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.