

Meditation: three minutes phone on tummy

Brendan Lloyd PhD, January 2024.

This Mindful meditation is about diaphragmatic breathing and the triggering of your vagus nerve for relaxation. The meditation is also an opportunity to practise diaphragmatic breathing so that it becomes more natural for you in your everyday life.

The meditation

This exercise is best done lying down on your back, belly up, with a cushion under your knees. Set the timer on your phone, if you like, to three minutes. Place your phone on your tummy around halfway between your bellybutton and your ribs.

At first, just lie there to feel the weight of the phone on your tummy. Expand your tummy a couple of times to see that the phone is stable. It needs to stay there whilst you breathe in and out.

Once you have the phone settled on your tummy, notice its weight. It's not that heavy. All the same it has some mass and you should be able to feel it.

Now do some weight lifting. With your tummy, lift the phone. You can think of this as similar to a bench-press. Instead of barbells, you use your phone. Instead of your arms, you use your belly.

Get the movement going, lift and drop, lift and drop. As you lift the phone with your tummy feel the weight. Just relax your tummy to let the phone go back down again. Pay conscious attention to the phone's weight as you lift and drop.

Now connect your breath to the lifting and dropping of the phone's weight. Start with the in-breath. With your in-breath lift the phone. If you still need to push your tummy out on purpose at first, then keep it up. Don't stop.

Notice how your tummy naturally expands out as you breathe in. Try to get your breath to do all the lifting. Naturally if you take a deep breath, the phone will rise the highest.

It might seem at first that you're forcing it. Keep doing this until it becomes natural and relaxed. To relax all you need to do is let-go. Let-go of all your muscles. You are lying down so you don't need tension in your body at all. Do a quick body-scan to find tension and release it.

Try to isolate your diaphragm muscle. It's there just under your ribcage. Operate this muscle only. As you breath-in, your diaphragm expands and pushes on your guts. This pushing on your guts causes your tummy to expand. This expansion will lift your phone without the use of any other muscles.

At first your breath-rate might be faster than usual. You might simply be excited about your new-found ability to do weight-lifting with your breath. Live it up I say. Then draw your attention to the out-breath.

Your out-breath is nothing more than an act of relaxation. Or, at least it need be no more than an act of relaxation. You do not need to breath-out. If you do absolutely nothing, your body will just breath-out all on its own.

This is when you can begin to settle into the mediation. In other words, your conscious attention is on the phone's weight. You engage your breath and notice the phone lift. Then you let-go and the weight of the phone slowly drops.

Whilst you focus your attention on your phone rising and falling, you have your attention in real-time. You will notice that from time to time your mind will wander off to elsewhere. Your mind will drift into the interminable head-chatter.

If you were to stay there in the head-chatter, with your attention elsewhere, you will return to the habitual shallow breathing. The meditation part is to bring your attention back to your breath. Come back to the weight of the phone to remind you of your breath.

We're talking about a deliberate conscious act of bring your attention back to real-time. Your breath is always a real-time event.

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The outcome

In the short-term there is the relaxation benefit. In the long-term, with regular practise, there is the skill development. Both outcomes are equally valid. No matter how skilful you are, stuff happens anyway.

With a skilful mind you will at least spend less time feeling stressed anxious depressed. This has to be a good thing.