

Mindfulness Practice Instructions

Posture

Take an upright posture

- ❖ If your chair has a flat seat, move forward away from the backrest so that you are not leaning back. If the chair's seat is sloped back, sit so that only your bottom is touching the backrest.
- ❖ Feet are flat on the floor.
- ❖ Sit up straight, raising your posture up from the hips, feeling dignified and relaxed.
- ❖ Shoulders are in a neutral position, neither thrusting your chest out nor hunching your shoulders.
- ❖ Hands rest palms down on your thighs, behind your knees. Your fingers are fairly close together.

Lower and soften the gaze

- ❖ Look straight ahead for a few moments. Your eyes are open, looking to the horizon, and your face is facing forward. Your chin is neither pointed downwards nor floating up.
- ❖ Lower your gaze to rest about six to eight feet in front of you. Your focus is relaxed, neither staring at a particular object nor wandering around.

Relax the jaws, tuck in the chin

- ❖ Allow your mouth to relax and your lips to part a little so that you are not clenching your jaws.
- ❖ You may find that the tip of your tongue naturally comes to rest just behind the upper teeth on the palate, if that is comfortable.
- ❖ Breathe through either your mouth or nostrils.
- ❖ Gently tuck in the chin, connecting your whole posture.

Soften the belly and chest

- ❖ Bring your attention to your belly and allow it to relax completely.
- ❖ As your belly relaxes, allow your chest to relax, too, feeling less defensive and more vulnerable towards yourself. Your back feels strong and firm and your front feels soft and open.

Include the emotions

- ❖ Bring your attention to your heart. Feel, without judgment, whatever you sense emotionally. Include the texture of those emotional qualities in your practice.
- ❖ Emotions are a natural part of being human. Allow these feelings to be exactly as they are, without feeling stuck in them, indulging in them or ignoring them.

Breath

Synchronize with the out-breath

- ❖ Bring your attention to your breathing. Without changing the rhythm of the breath, simply become aware of the breath going in and out.
- ❖ In particular, pay attention to the movement of the out-breath. The breath goes out and expands, and your attention, which lightly rides the breath, goes out and expands, as well. The breath and your attention then dissolve together. There is no need to imagine or visualize your breath going out. Simply feel the “breathiness” of the breath, extend your attention into the space in front of you and let go. At that moment, you are also letting go of your focus on the meditation technique.
- ❖ During the in-breath, touch the dignity of your body’s upright posture, feeling very present and awake. You do not have to follow the breath in. Simply regard the in-breath as a preparation for following the next breath out.

Set the intention

- ❖ It is very helpful to set a clear intention about the practice, to say to yourself mentally: “During this practice session, I want to be present for each and every out-breath.” By making that firm commitment, you will likely be better able to recognize when your attention begins to drift or when you have become distracted. Expressing this intention supports your determination to come back to the present moment.

Thoughts

Label thoughts

- ❖ When thoughts begin to arise and you find yourself distracted, acknowledge that distraction by mentally labelling, “*thinking*,” and return your attention to the movement of the out-breath. It does not matter what the contents of the thoughts are – all thoughts, whether insightful or mundane, are treated equally. The tone of your inner voice when labelling should be both gentle and precise. There is no need to block or suppress thoughts, or to respond to them in any way.

You are simply sitting, being present in the body, following each out-breath with a light touch and letting it dissolve. Whenever you get distracted, say to yourself, “*thinking*,” return to the dignity of your body and follow the next breath out. Label as often as necessary without waiting to ambush the next thought. Keep the practice simple, precise, honest and spacious.

Everyday practice

The suggestion is to practice this technique for ten or more minutes every morning and evening. As you practice more, you will find that your body will gradually adjust to the posture. It feels good to be able to sit upright, dignified and relaxed, synchronizing body, heart, mind and breath. This open, genuine and brave practice provides the opportunity to connect directly with our basic human goodness.