

Muscle Relaxation Technique

(Adapted from Edmund Jacobson)

Please lean back in your chair. Make yourself comfortable. Place both feet flat on the floor. Rest your hands comfortably in your lap. Follow the instructions on your screen.

Begin by stretching your legs as far as they can go . . . Relax. Stretch your legs, again. Move your feet up, towards you, hold . . . turn your feet down, away from you . . . Hold . . . Relax.

Now, tighten the muscles in your calves and those in your thighs. Tight. Hold it, hold it . . . and relax.

Let your legs go back, slowly, down to their original position and relax all the muscles in your feet, all the muscles in your calves, all the muscles in your thighs. Let your legs be completely relaxed. And now, feel that wonderful relaxation coming up from your toes, up your calves and your thighs. Feeling nicely relaxed, very calm . . . and . . . very relaxed. Calm and relaxed. Take some time to take your attention away from the screen. Focus on your legs and feel your relaxation.

Now, stretch out your arms. Make two fists, tighten the muscles in your fingers. Feel the tightness. Hold it, hold it . . . and relax. Let your arms go down to their resting position. Feel that relaxation. Now stretch your arms again. Tighten the muscles in your wrists, in your lower arms, in your upper arms . . . Hold it, hold it . . . And, let go, just let go, let your arms go down to their original position. Stop for a second, and take your time to notice that quieting feeling of relaxation through your fingers, your hands, through your lower arms, and upper arms. Let your arms go completely limp. Take your time to increase that feeling of relaxation. Very relaxed, very calm, very relaxed and calm.

Now, arch your back backwards, raise your chest. Tighten the muscles in your chest, your abdomen, your back, and your neck. Hold it . . . hold it . . . Let go of the tension. Just let go of the tension. Notice your muscle relaxation. Take time to feel the muscles relax in your chest, in your abdomen, in your neck, all over your back. All your muscles feel nicely relaxed.

Now, tighten the muscles in your face, first the muscles around your forehead, then the muscles around your eyes. Make them tighter. Hold it . . . hold it . . . and relax. Now, tighten the muscles of your cheeks, the muscles around your mouth, the muscles of your chin. Make them tighter . . . Hold it, hold it . . . and relax. Let all the muscles in your face relax, first the muscles of your chin, then the muscles around your mouth, the muscles of your cheeks, the muscles around your eyes, the muscles of your forehead. Let all the tension drain from your face. Let your chin sag if that feels good. Take your time to enjoy the feeling of relaxation. Very relaxed and very calm. Relaxed and calm.

Now, breathe in through your nose, slowly, and deeply. Breathe the air down into your abdomen first, then your chest, and your throat. Hold it, hold it . . . and slowly breathe it out through your nose. Feel the relaxation. Breathe in, tense up . . . Breathe out, relax.

Once again, take a very deep breath, hold it . . . hold it and slowly let it out. Let go of all your tension, your frustrations, your anxieties, feeling more and more relaxed. Relaxed and calm.

Now, take some time to scan your body. If you notice any tensional spot, take your time to release that tension. Very good, very relaxed.

Now, take time to breathe in and out; stretch your body; focus on your surroundings. Be ready to continue your day. Relaxed and calm. Focused and attentive.

Mindfulness

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness means to deliberately pay attention to whatever you are doing, right now. These pages can be read mindfully or with a mind not fully focussed and aware that you are reading an article. Everything except sleep can be done mindfully. We can eat mindfully or we can think about past or future event without paying attention to our eating.

What is mindfulness therapy?

Mindfulness therapy means firstly to have a daily mindfulness practice and to use what we learn from it to remain mindful, aware, during the difficult situations in life. In particular we become aware of our

- **thoughts** “I must be stupid to do this”,
- **feelings**: sadness, anger etc,
- **behaviour**: aggression, withdrawing, doing a breathing exercise
- **physiological changes**: fast breathing, weight in stomach, pins and needles, nausea.

These are the big four, we will be coming back to thoughts, feelings, behaviour, physiological changes time and again. A range of mindfulness exercises address the different areas.

Mindfulness therapy means to simply observe what is happening to us in those four areas, particularly with difficult emotions. You may express what is happening either in a journal or to someone else but there is no intention to change anything. The aim is more to become familiar with how the mind works and its habit patterns.

What are the benefits of mindfulness?

Your mind is like any other part of your being, there are benefits from understanding how it works and you can train it to work better. Specifically a mindfulness practice has the following benefits:

1. **Stability of mind** – maintaining your mind in an alert clear space rather than at the two extremes of a dull or agitated mind.
2. **Flexibility of mind** – the ability to shift your mind to whatever object you choose, rather than having it bounce haphazardly between a number of issues
3. **Self awareness** – being aware of the contents of your mind and understanding the typical patterns of your mind
4. **Acting rather than reacting** – Becoming less reactive, e.g. when you are angry and choosing how you will act.

It's not called a practice for nothing. Like any other form of therapy real change will require hard work and commitment, in this case a commitment to maintain your practice six days per week.

Mini mindfulness Exercise.

This is a brief exercise of mindfulness of five or six breaths to be practiced five times per day. It can be practiced anywhere at any time.

1. Step out of automatic pilot and become aware of what you are doing right now, where you are and what you are thinking
2. Become aware of our breathing for about a minute or half a dozen breaths.
3. Expand your awareness to your whole body and then to your environment, if you wish.

The first thing we do with this practice, because it's brief and we want to come into the moment quickly, is to take a very definite posture ... relaxed, dignified, back erect, but not stiff, letting our bodies express a sense of being present and awake.

Now, closing your eyes, if that feels comfortable for you, the first step is being aware, really aware, of what is going on with you right now. Becoming aware of what is going through your mind; what thoughts are around? Here, again, as best you can, just noting the thoughts as mental events.... So we note them, and then we note the feelings that are around at the moment ... in particular, turning toward any sense of discomfort or unpleasant feelings. So rather than try to push them away or shut them out, just acknowledge them, perhaps saying, "Ah, there you are, that's how it is right now." And similarly with sensations in the body... Are there sensations of tension, of holding, or whatever? And again, awareness of them, simply noting them. OK, that's how it is right now.

So, we've got a sense of what is going on right now. We've stepped out of automatic pilot. The second step is to collect our awareness by focusing on a single object—the movements of the breath. So now we really gather ourselves, focusing attention down there in the movements of the abdomen or other breath focus point such as the nostrils or roof of the mouth, the rise and fall of the breath ... spending a minute or so to focus on the movement of the abdominal wall ... moment by moment, breath by breath, as best we can. So that you know when the breath is moving in, and you know when the breath is moving out. Just binding your awareness to the pattern of movement down there ... gathering yourself, using the anchor of the breath to really be present.

And now as a third step, having gathered ourselves to some extent, we allow our awareness to expand. As well as being aware of the breath, we also include a sense of the body as a whole. So that we get this more spacious awareness.... A sense of the body as a whole, including any tightness or sensations related to holding in the shoulders, neck, back, or face ... following the breath as if your whole body is breathing. Holding it all in this slightly softer ... more spacious awareness.

And then, when you are ready, just allowing your eyes to open and mindfully continuing with your daily activity.

Informal Mindfulness Exercises

Take Ten Breaths

1. Throughout the day, pause for a moment and take ten slow, deep breaths. Focus on breathing out as slowly as possible, until the lungs are completely empty, and breathing in using your diaphragm.
2. Notice the sensations of your lungs emptying and your ribcage falling as you breathe out. Notice the rising and falling of your abdomen.
3. Notice what thoughts are passing through your mind. Notice what feelings are passing through your body.
4. Observe those thoughts and feelings without judging them as good or bad, and without trying to change them, avoid them, or hold onto them. Simply observe them.
5. Notice what it's like to observe those thoughts and feelings with an attitude of acceptance.

Notice Five Things

This is a simple exercise to center yourself, and connect with your environment. Practice it throughout the day, especially any time you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts and feelings.

1. Pause for a moment
2. Look around, and notice five things you can see.
3. Listen carefully, and notice five things you can hear.
4. Notice five things you can feel in contact with your body. (E.g. your watch against your wrist, your trousers against your legs, the air upon your face, your feet upon the floor, your back against the chair etc)

Source: Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) Introductory Workshop Handout 2007.
Dr Russell Harris, M.B.B.S, M.A.C. Psych. Med.

Mindfulness of the Breath

1. Settle into a comfortable sitting position, either on a straight-backed chair or on a soft surface on the floor, with your buttocks supported by cushions or a low stool. If you use a chair, it is very helpful to sit away from the back of the chair, so that your spine is self supporting. If you sit on the floor, it is helpful if your knees actually touch the floor; experiment with the height of the cushions or stool until you feel comfortably and firmly supported.
2. Allow your back to adopt an erect, dignified, and comfortable posture. If sitting on a chair, place your feet flat on the floor, with your legs uncrossed. Gently close your eyes. It may help to imagine a light thread attached to the back of your scalp pulling your head gently upwards and allowing your spine to lengthen.
3. Bring your awareness to the level of physical sensations by focusing your attention on the sensations of touch and pressure in your body where it makes contact with the floor and whatever you are sitting on. Spend a minute or two exploring these sensations.
4. Now bring your awareness to the changing patterns of physical sensations in the lower abdomen as the breath moves in and out of your body (When you first try this practice, it may be helpful to place your hand on your lower abdomen and become aware of the changing pattern of sensations where your hand makes contact with your abdomen, Having "tuned in" to the physical sensations in this area in this way, you can remove your hand and continue to focus on the sensations in the abdominal wall.)
5. Focus your awareness on the sensations of slight stretching as the abdominal wall rises with each inbreath, and of gentle deflation as it falls with each outbreath. As best you can, follow with your awareness the changing physical sensations in the lower abdomen all the way through as the breath enters your body on the inbreath and all the way through as the breath leaves your body on the outbreath, perhaps noticing the slight pauses between one inbreath and the following outbreath, and between one outbreath and the following inbreath.
6. There is no need to try to control the breathing in any way—simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can, also bring this attitude of allowing to the rest of your experience. There is nothing to be fixed, no particular state to be achieved. As best you can, simply allow your experience to be your experience, without needing it to be other than it is.

The Mindfulness Guide for the Super Busy: How to Live Life to the Fullest

“Smile, breathe and go slowly.” - Thich Nhat Hanh, Zen Buddhist monk

Post written by [Leo Babauta](#). Follow me on [Twitter](#).

The idea of being mindful — being present, being more conscious of life as it happens — seems a bit impossible to many of the super busy.

But not only is it possible, I'd submit that it's desirable, and that it'll help the busy (and non-busy) achieve their goals and enjoy life more fully.

One of my favorite web big shots, Digg.com founder Kevin Rose (who is actually heading several companies and multiple other projects), has “be mindful” at the top of his [resolutions for 2009](#). I hope he's doing well, and I'd love to hear how someone as busy as he is implements a resolution like that.

But in case Mr. Rose, and other super-busy types, are having trouble being mindful and living life to the fullest, this guide will help.

Enjoying Life and Achieving Goals

It seems contradictory to those who are used to sacrificing *living* for pursuing their goals ... but cultivating mindfulness will help you achieve your goals *and* enjoy life more.

Focusing on one task at a time, putting yourself fully into that task, is much more effective than multi-tasking. Focusing on one real goal at a time is also more effective. I've proven it to myself time and again over the last few years (see [My Story](#) for more). Focusing on what you're doing right now is highly effective. You're *more* productive when you're mindful.

But more importantly, being present is undoubtedly the only way to enjoy life to the fullest. By being mindful, you enjoy your food more, you enjoy friends and family more, you enjoy anything you're doing more. Anything. Even things you might think are drudgery or boring, such as housework, can be amazing if you are truly present. Try it — wash dishes or sweep or cook, and remain fully present. It takes practice, but it's incredible.

One Month Challenge

The best method I can offer for learning to be present, the best method for practicing, is to focus on it for one month. Make focusing on being present a habit. If you make it your only focus, I guarantee you'll get better at it, and more importantly, you'll get into the habit of remembering to focus, of remembering to practice, of being more aware.

Do a one-month challenge. It's the best method for forming new habits, and it works for being present. A good way to do this is join the monthly challenge on the [Zen Habits forums](#) or on [The Power of Less Challenge forum](#). Then do the following:

8. Eat slowly and savor your food. Food can be crammed down our throats in a rush, but where's the joy in that? Savor each bite, slowly, and really get the most out of your food. Interestingly, you'll eat less this way, and digest your food better as well.

9. Live slowly and savor your life. Just as you would savor your food by eating it more slowly, do everything this way — slow down and savor each and every moment. As I type this, for example, I have my 3-year-old daughter, Noelle, on my lap. She's just sitting here quietly, as the rain pours down in a hush outside. What a lovely moment. In fact, I'm going to take a few minutes off just to be with her now. Be right back. :)

10. Make cleaning and cooking become meditation. Cooking and cleaning are often seen as drudgery, but actually they are both great ways to practice mindfulness, and can be great rituals performed each day. If cooking and cleaning seem like boring chores to you, try doing them as a form of meditation. Put your entire mind into those tasks, concentrate, and do them slowly and completely. It could change your entire day (as well as leave you with a cleaner house).

11. Keep practicing. When you get frustrated, just take a deep breath. When you ask yourself, "What should I do now, Self?", the answer is "keep practicing".

"When you drive around the city and come to a red light or a stop sign, you can just sit back and make use of these twenty or thirty seconds to relax — to breathe in, breathe out, and enjoy arriving in the present moment. There are many things like that we can do." - **Thich Nhat Hanh**

I'll leave you with a video from one of my favorite mindfulness teachers, **Thich Nhat Hanh** (check out his books, [Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life](#), and [True Love: A Practice for Awakening the Heart](#)):

Also read:

- **Write To Done:** [The Culture of Sharing: Why Releasing Copyright Will Be the Smartest Thing You Do](#)

Read more about simple productivity, focus and getting great things done in my book, [The Power of Less](#).

Stressbusters—Penelope Salinger, LCSW

Belly Breathing

Watch a sleeping infant breathe. Notice that on the in-breath the belly rises. On the out-breath, the belly falls. You can relearn this by lying on your back with something you can see—a pillow or stuffed animal, etc.—placed on your belly. Watch the top of this object move upward as you breathe in and downward as you breathe out. Keep this pattern going while in a seated or standing position.

Alternate Nostril Breathing

1. Place your finger against one nostril to block it off.
2. Exhale through the open nostril.
3. Pause.
4. Inhale through the open nostril.
5. Pause.
6. Switch, placing your finger against the other nostril to block it off.
7. Exhale through the open nostril.
8. Pause.
9. Inhale through the open nostril.
10. Pause.
11. Repeat by switching nostrils, as many times as desired, ending with the second nostril that was blocked off.

4-7-8 Breathing

1. Breathe in to the count of 4 seconds
2. Hold to the count of 7 seconds
3. Exhale slowly to the count of 8 seconds

Repeat. (This is particularly helpful at bedtime, as it shifts the nervous system into “relax” mode.)

Grounding

1. First Level of Support: Pay attention to your connection with whatever is providing support for your physical body – the earth, the floor, a chair, a bed, etc.
2. Amplify your awareness by breathing into the various points of connection—the soles of your feet, the backs of your legs, your buttocks, your back, etc.
3. On the in-breath, say to yourself “I am fully supported.”
4. On the out-breath, say to yourself, “I can let go.”
5. Do a quick scan of your body from head to toe, to see if there are any muscles that can be encouraged to take a break and relax.
6. Second Level of Support: Pay attention to the support you receive from others in your life, both specific individuals and people you don’t even know (who are, nonetheless, doing things that enable you to live your life).
7. Third Level of Support: Pay attention to the unseen level of support—whatever that means to you. It may be the ancestors, a belief in a Higher Power, angels, guides, teachers, etc.

5-4-3-2-1 Mindfulness Practice

- Vision: Look around and name 5 things you see in this moment.
- Tactile: Name 4 things you physically sense in this moment.
- Hearing: Close your eyes and name 3 things you hear in this moment.
- Olfactory: Name 2 things you smell in this moment.
- Taste: Name 1 thing you taste in this moment.

"Aikido Master" Stance

1. With feet shoulder width apart and knees relaxed, shift weight from side to side until you find a center point, equally balanced.
2. Shift weight forward and back several times (from toes and ball of foot to heels) until you find a center point.
3. Pay attention to the readiness that results.
4. Focus attention in your head, as if it were the center of gravity for your body.
5. Move that center of gravity downward, into the center of your chest.
6. Move that center of gravity downward, into your belly/abdomen.
7. Pay attention to the stability that results.
8. Try on the mantle of an Aikido Master—grounded, centered, balance, both alert and relaxed, ready to assess any situation accurately with both detachment and compassion, ready to take appropriate action that results in a "dance" rather than a "confrontation."

Physical Release:

Full-Body Shaking—If you are feeling nervous, anxious, or shaky, allow your body to shake. Begin with your hands, add your arms, then your shoulders, then your head, then your hips, knees, and feet. Think of it as a version of the "Hokey Pokey" and enjoy it as much as you can.

Isometrics—Spread your fingers and place your fingertips and thumbs of opposite hands together. On the out-breath, push, push, push as forcefully as you can. On the in-breath, create space between your hands and relax them completely. Repeat. On the out-breath, notice how far up into your arms you can feel the sensation of pushing.

Energy Shower—(To let go of any residue from a challenging, uncomfortable, or disturbing interaction.) Using the tips of your 2 middle fingers, lightly brush the center lines of your body.

1. Begin at the forehead between your eyebrows. Brush up over the top of the head, down the back of your neck, around to the throat, down the center of your torso, over the groin, down the front of your legs, knees, calves, and feet.
2. With one hand reach across the front of your body to the back of your neck on the opposite side. Brush down your arm, wrist, hand, and fingers. Repeat on the opposite side.
3. Begin at the highest point you can reach on your spine, brush along the vertebrae, then over the buttocks, back of the legs, knees, calves, and heels.
4. Brush your face, neck, and under your hair.
5. Repeat the cycle 3 times.

Laughing Vowels Practice

1. With focus on the lower abdomen/belly area, say "Hu, hu, hu" (as many times as needed).
2. With focus on the stomach/diaphragm area, say "Ho, ho, ho" (as many times as needed).
3. With focus on the center of the chest at heart level, say "Ha, ha, ha" (as many times as needed).
4. With focus on the throat, say "Heh, heh, heh," (as many times as needed).
5. With focus on the bridge of the nose and area between the eyes, say "Hee, hee, hee" (as many times as needed).

Note: If you dissolve in laughter before completing all the vowels, this is perfectly fine.

Stress Relievers

Need a quick-or not so quick--- stress break? Fresh out of ideas? Try one of these:

ANGRY? TALK TO A FRIEND ABOUT IT.

Apologize for a mistake.

SING A SONG. Stand up and **Stretch**

Meditate

Dance

Build a model ship.



Someone "I love you." a joke.

TELL

Write...

down your fears. down your dreams. your congressman or congresswoman.

Stop & yawn!

Ask for help.

Stop & look out the window.

Work out a crossword puzzle.

Call up an old friend.

Get up 15 minutes early.

Lie in a hammock.

Cut back on caffeine

Change coffee break to exercise break.

Play with your dog.

Lift weights

Hug a tree.

Watch a really good movie.



Plan ahead.

Count to 10-or 1000-before exploding

listen

to the Birds

Write a poem

Count

your

blessings



Hug someone you love.



Make a list. Then follow it!

Read a good book.

Forgive someone.

Do one thing at a time.

Laugh at something you did.

Close your eyes...what do you see?

at the big picture. Sit by a fire. Look closely at a flower leaf or a tree. off into the distance.

get a pet.

WEAR EARPLUGS WHEN IT'S NOISY.

Look

Make time for play.

PUT:

- ...a cat in your lap
- ...on some music
- ...plants in your office
- ...your feet up

Eat an orange slowly, segment by segment.

Spend your coffee break @ the beach.

- ✓ Take a child to the playground
- ✓ Take a deep breath and let it all out.
- ✓ Take a leisurely stroll.
- ✓ Take a long bath.
- ✓ Take a nap.
- ✓ Take an herb tea break.
- ✓ Take one day at a time.
- ✓ Take the back roads.
- ✓ Take the stairs.
- ✓ Take time for the sunset - or sunrise.
- ✓ Take up knitting.

Roll your shoulders up and around in a circular motion.

shoot some HOOPS



plant a flower. smell a rose. draw flowers.

Massage your temples.

Talk to yourself: "I can do a great job." "I can stay calm under pressure."

Spend an evening without TV.

READ SOMETHING FUNNY EVERY DAY!

GO: for a walk

Ride your bike to work.



LEARN TO SAY NO.

CLASP YOUR HANDS BEHIND YOUR HEAD AND STRETCH YOUR SHOULDERS.

RELAXATION EXERCISES TO TRY AT HOME

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Lie on your back in a comfortable position. Allow your arms to rest at your sides, palms down, on the surface next to you.
- Inhale and exhale slowly and deeply.
- Clench your hands into fists and hold them tightly for 15 seconds. As you do this, relax the rest of your body. Visualize your fists contracting, becoming tighter and tighter.
- Then let your hands relax. On relaxing, see a golden light flowing into the entire body, making all your muscles soft and pliable.
- Now, tense and relax the following parts of your body in this order: face, shoulders, back, stomach, pelvis, legs, feet, and toes. Hold each part tensed for 15 seconds and then relax your body for 30 seconds before going on to the next part.
- Finish the exercise by shaking your hands and imagining the remaining tension flowing out of your fingertips.

Tension Release Through Color

- Sit or lie in a comfortable position, your arms resting at your sides. As you take a deep breath, visualize that the earth below you is filled with the color blue. This blue color extends 50 feet below you into the earth. Now imagine that you are opening up energy centers on the bottom of your feet. As you inhale, visualize the soft blue color filling up your feet. When your feet are completely filled with the color blue, then bring the color up through your ankles, legs, pelvis, and lower back.
- Each time you exhale, see the blue color leaving through your lungs, carrying all tension and stress with it. See the tension dissolve into the air.
- Continue to inhale blue into your abdomen, chest, shoulders, arms, neck, and head. Exhale the blue slowly out of your lungs. Repeat this entire process five times and then relax for a few minutes.