

Acceptance of Thoughts and Feelings Exercise Instructions

1. Get into a comfortable position in your chair. Sit upright with your feet flat on the floor, your arms and legs uncrossed, and your hands resting in your lap (palms up or down, whichever is more comfortable). Allow your eyes to close gently.
2. Take a few moments to get in touch with the movement of your breath and the sensations in the body. Bring your awareness to the physical sensations in your body, especially to the sensations of touch or pressure, where your body makes contact with the chair or floor.
3. Now, slowly bring your attention to the gentle rising and falling of your breath in your chest and belly. Like ocean waves coming in and out, your breath is always there. Notice its rhythm in your body. Notice each breath. Focus on each inhale ... and exhale. Notice the changing patterns of sensations in your belly as you breathe in, and as you breathe out. Take a few moments to feel the physical sensations as you breathe in and as you breathe out.
4. There is no need to try to control your breathing in any way—simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can, also bring this attitude of generous allowing and gentle acceptance to the rest of your experience. There is nothing to be fixed, no particular state to be achieved. As best as you can, simply allow your experience to be your experience, without needing it to be other than what it is.
5. Sooner or later, your mind will wander away from the breath to other concerns, thoughts, worries, images, bodily sensations, planning, or daydreams, or it may just drift along. This is what minds do much of the time. When you notice that your mind has wandered, gently congratulate yourself—you have come back and are once more aware of your experience! You may want to acknowledge briefly where your mind has been (*Ah, there's thinking or there's feeling*). Then, gently escort your attention back to the sensation of the breath coming in and going out. As best you can, bring a quality of kindness and compassion to your awareness, perhaps seeing the repeated wanderings of your mind as opportunities to bring patience and gentle curiosity to your experience.
6. When you become aware of bodily sensations and feelings, tension, or other intense sensations in a particular part of your body, just notice them, acknowledge their presence, and see if you can make space for them. Do not try to hold on to them or make them go away. See if you can open your heart and make some room for the discomfort, for the tension, for the anxiety, just allowing them be there. Is there enough space in you to welcome in all of your experience?
7. Watch the sensations change from moment to moment. Sometimes they grow stronger, sometimes they stay the same, and sometimes they grow weaker—it does not matter. Breathe calmly in *to* and out *from* the sensations of discomfort, imagining the breath moving in *to* and out *from* that region of the body. Remember, your intention is not to make you feel *better* but to get better at *feeling*.
8. If you ever notice that you are unable to focus on your breathing because of intense physical

sensations of discomfort in your body, let go of your focus on the breath and shift your focus to the place of discomfort. Gently direct your attention *on* and *into* the discomfort and stay with it, no matter how bad it seems. Take a look at it. What does it *really* feel like? Again, see if you can make room for the discomfort and allow it to be there. Are you willing to be with whatever you have?

9. Along with physical sensations in your body, you may also notice thoughts about the sensations and thoughts about the thoughts. You may notice your mind coming up with evaluative labels such as “dangerous” or “getting worse.” If that happens, you can thank your mind for the label and return to the present experience as it is, not as your mind says it is, noticing thoughts as thoughts, physical sensations as physical sensations, feelings as feelings—nothing more, nothing less.
 10. To help you experience the difference between yourself and your thoughts and feelings, you can name thoughts and feelings as you notice them. For instance, if you notice you are worrying, silently say to yourself, “Worry ... there is worry” just observing worry and not judging yourself for having these thoughts and feelings. If you find yourself judging, just notice that and call it “Judging ... there is judging” and observe that with a quality of kindness and compassion. You can do the same with other thoughts and feelings and just name them as *planning*, *reminiscing*, *longing*, or whatever you experience. Label the thought or emotion and move on. Thoughts and feelings come and go in your mind and body. You are not what those thoughts and feelings say, no matter how persistent or intense they may be.
 11. As this time for formal practice comes to an end, gradually widen your attention to take in the sounds around you ... notice your surroundings and slowly open your eyes with the intention to bring this awareness to the present moment and into the upcoming moments of the day.
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