

Mindfulness Worksheet - Calming Exhale Breath

When we're anxious or nervous our breathing becomes shorter and more shallow. The body emphasizes the inhale breath as the sympathetic nervous system activates, taking charge of our reaction to stress.

Breathing through the nose, breathing more patiently, and emphasizing the exhale breath, all have a calming effect. These physical movements activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which triggers a relaxing effect.

Breathing through the nose, and taking longer to breathe out than in, is a way in which we can use the body to tell the mind that we are safe.

In this worksheet, we will work with this calming meditation technique. First by breathing evenly, matching the length of the exhale breath to the length of the breath in. Eventually, we'll extend the exhale breath, so that it's longer than the breath in.

Over time, we'll work our way up to an exhale breath that's 1.5 times the length of the breath in.

Meditating on the Exhale Breath

- Take a comfortable seat in a quiet place, free from distractions
- Set a timer for 5, 7 or 10 minutes
- Sit up tall, let your arms hang naturally, and rest your hands in your lap
- Close your eyes if you'd like
- Breathe slowly and gently in and out through your nose
- Notice the length of the inhale breath, compared to the length of each exhale
- Without forcing the breath, without discomfort, move towards equal breathing
- Count to three on breath in, and count to three on breath out
- After some time with equal breath, gradually lengthen each exhale
- Count to three on breath in, but four on breath out
- Stay within your comfort zone. Breathing should remain gentle, and easy
- Eventually, nudge your way to an inhale count of three, and an exhale count of 5
- Stay with that rhythm until your timer goes off

What Did You Notice?

- Describe your experience with the meditation in general
- When you first noticed the breath, were you breathing equally?
- Do you think it's possible to notice your breath, without changing your breath?
- Did you notice a connection between the quality of your breath, and your state of mind?
- Describe the experience of lengthening your exhale breaths
- As you focused more on the exhale breath, did you notice a change in your mind?
- With what rhythm did your breathing feel most comfortable?
- How did the meditation improve your breath awareness in general?
- Did the counting contribute to your breath awareness?
- What did the meditation show you about your state of mind?
- How did your state of mind change throughout the meditation, if at all?
- How might you use this breathing technique outside of meditation?

Review

The quality of the breath is a reflection of the quality of the mind. Most of us understand that when the mind and the body experience stress, the breathing becomes shallow and short. We also understand that when the body and mind are experiencing ease, the breath lengthens and relaxes.

What is less commonly understood is the fact that this connection between breath, body and mind works in all directions. We can intentionally change our breathing to cue the body and mind to relax.

The connection between body, mind, and breath works in all directions. We can use breath awareness to learn more about our state of mind, and we can manipulate the physical breath to alter this state of mind. Likewise, a calm state of mind, promotes ease in the body and breath.

Knowing this, we can promote greater calm and ease in body, breath, and mind by working on any one of the three, or all of them together.