

Just Breathe

To de-stress fast, take a few minutes to breathe and observe that rhythm of expansion and contraction.

Sit comfortably, with your back upright but not rigid. Holding your spine straight provides a stable feeling in your body, which in turn helps you stabilize your mind. It will help you remain alert, yet relaxed.

Here's one easy way to straighten your spine:

- Breathe in deeply.
- At the top of breathing in, raise your shoulders up a bit.
- Then as you breathe out, roll your shoulders back and down.
- Next, tuck your chin in slightly.
- Feel your spine like a tree trunk, rooted into the ground and up to the sky. Or if you prefer, think of the spinal vertebrae as a stack of coins, one on top the other. Guard against a feeling of stiffness—you are not a wooden soldier. Sit lightly and easily, yet with a sense of mental alertness.

Giving the mind something to focus on helps you develop concentration, calm and a sense of ease. In this next meditation, you will be concentrating on your breath quietly, but with intensity.

1. Begin with a few moments of simply resting in open awareness.
2. Then gently move your attention to your breath. Breathing is an act we all do 24/7. The expansion and contraction of the abdomen and the chest are parts of a universal rhythm. Everything in the universe has this same rhythm of expansion and contraction. Focus all your attention on each breath, with newfound interest, as though it were something you've never done before (and that is true, you've never taken *this* breath before). Rest lightly on the breath, like a butterfly on a flower.
3. Observe the movement of your belly up and down. You may want to experience breathing in as a wave coming in to shore, breathing out as the wave going back out to sea. You do not need to change your breath, just observe it.
4. Notice the movement of air into and out of your body.
5. Notice the temperature of the air when it enters and leaves your body.
6. Notice the flow of air into your body, filling your lungs in all directions.
7. Feel the moment of stillness between breathing in and breathing out.