

THE BEGINNER'S MEDITATION ON THE BREATH™

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The Beginner's Meditation is just that. Most anyone who can follow simple instructions can do this exercise. Doing a focal attention exercise such as this one can benefit you on many levels. Firstly, it brings one to the present. In this crazy, digitally distracting time, most of us have a hard time staying focused, present, and in the moment. Sometimes we do things "mindlessly." For instance, have you ever come home and put down your keys or cell phone and later run around frantically trying to find them? Becoming "mindful" means we're not "mindless" – we're paying attention to the here and now. We're not multi-tasking, we are intentionally doing what we are doing.

Since the mind is "plastic" – changeable, by practicing certain exercises regularly for an extended period of time (at least a several months), there are actual, perceptible changes in the brain. If we were to have a pre-(meditation practice) and post- MRI study of our brain, there would be a "lighting up" showing increased activity in the prefrontal cortex (PFC) region of the brain.

The frontal lobes of the brain have been implicated in behavioral inhibition, the ability to control emotions and impulses. They are also the location for decision making about right and wrong. Cause and effect relationships are processed in the PFC. In contrast, the amygdala is part of the limbic system of the brain and is involved in instinctive "gut" reactions, including "fight or flight," automatic, knee jerk responses. Lower activity in the frontal lobe could lead to poor control over behavior and emotions, while an overactive amygdala may be associated with high levels of emotional arousal and reactionary decision-making.

HERE ARE THE BASIC INSTRUCTIONS IN THE BEGINNER'S MEDITATION:

If you do this with the instructions below, you may want to set a timer or have a background sound go off at a certain time. The Beginner's Meditation on the Breath recording is 6 minutes long and has been found to be quite effective in most cases even at that length. Long sessions are not necessary to find benefit. A link to the recording is here:

Introduction to The Beginner's Meditation & The Beginner's Meditation on the Breath:

<http://bit.do/beginnersmed>

1. Sit or lie down in a comfortable position, close your eyes.
2. Pay attention to your breath and its sensations (i.e., cooler when you inhale, warmer when you exhale, your stomach expands when you inhale, it contracts as you exhale, etc.).
3. Breathe comfortably at your own pace and speed.
4. Just notice the sensations in your body connected with your breath.
5. If your mind wanders, gently bring your focus back to your breath.
6. Gently and non-judgmentally dismiss any thoughts that arise.
7. Allow thoughts to pass like a cloud or a leaf floating down a stream.
8. Keep returning your focus to your breath.
9. When you are done with the exercise (5-10 minutes), open your eyes and slowly readjust to your surroundings.