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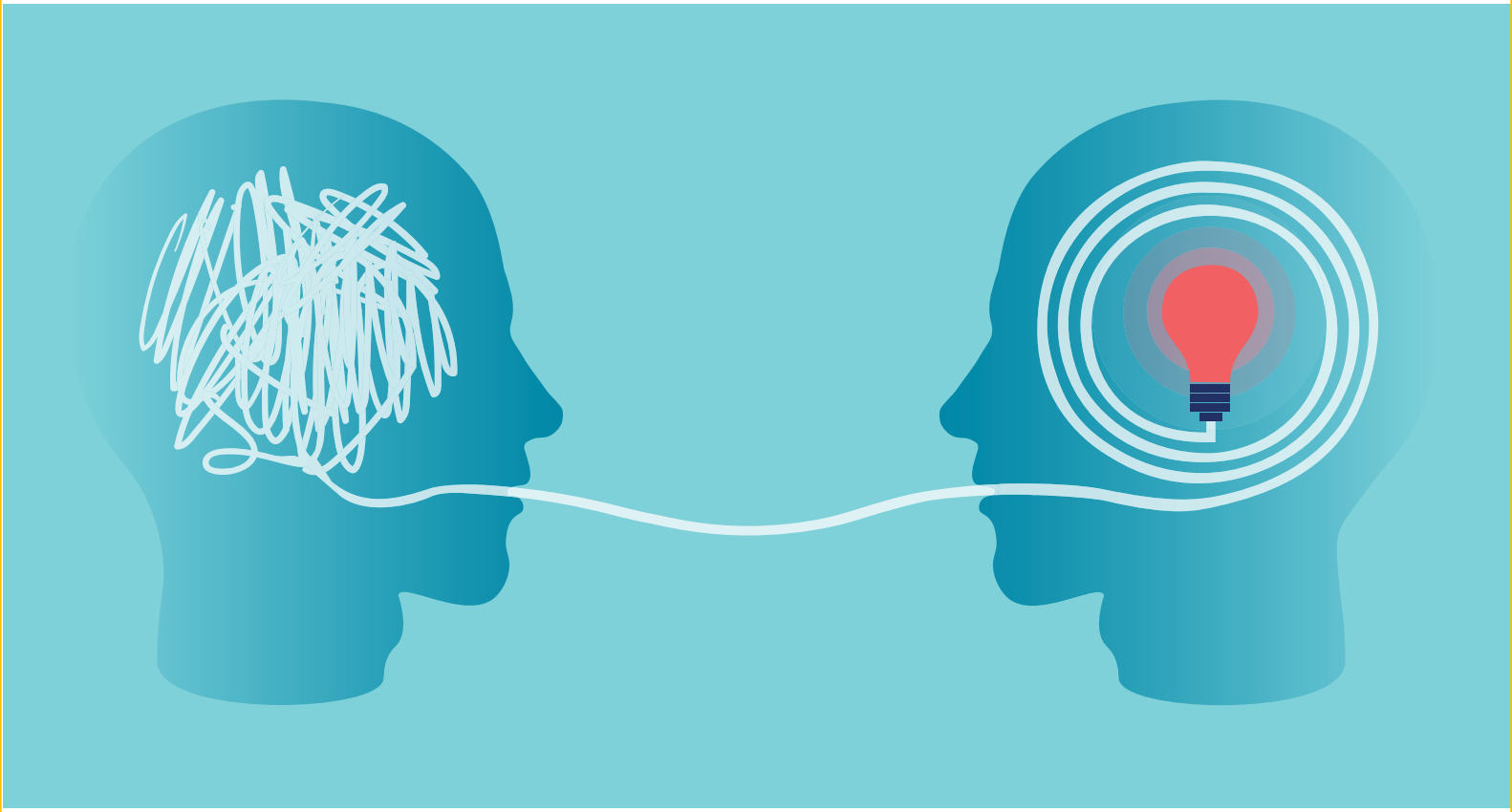
Explore Anxiety
With Mindfulness



FROM THE EDITORS OF

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Learning to Meditate Through Difficulty

Mindfulness teacher Ed Halliwell shares how he came to meditation after coping with anxiety and depression. **By Ed Halliwell**

Stomach somersaulting. Shoulders locked. Fingers quivering. Teeth clenched tight. Hot and cold simultaneously. Pangs of panic gripping the chest, heart pulsing fast and hard. Anger, like a scream bellowing out from the midriff. A shield of hard depression encasing the skin, walling off the body from the outside world. Thoughts circling round and round, the same ruminations over and over again: "Why am I stuck like this? Is it ever going to end? Why can't I be more like other people? Why can't I cope? What's wrong with me? I hate this, I hate this. I'm scared, *still* scared after all this time. This is never going to work. I am *never* going to get better. It's useless. Useless. *Useless!*"

I'm learning to meditate. Perched atop a square, hard cushion in the corner of my bedroom, trying to pay attention to the movement of my breath, and *this* is what I'm noticing. It's the same kind of anguish that's accompanied every waking hour for the past two and a half

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years. The fear, the rage, the helplessness. But there's a subtle and crucial difference now. I'm beginning to observe these patterns of thought and feeling from a different place, from somewhere I didn't previously know existed. Rather than feeling caught up entirely in the mental noise, the exhaustion, the tension, I'm beginning to *watch* what's happening. Perhaps not yet with equanimity—as is meant to be possible with enough practice—but at least without feeling that my life is nothing but pain. A sliver of space is opening up between "me" and the tormenting thoughts and sensations that are surging through "me." Hmm, this is interesting . . .

I've been practicing for a couple of months now—daily doses of five or ten minutes, as agreed with my meditation teacher. Initially, even this seemed too much—the invitation to experience just a little stillness, and its implied tolerance of anxiety, was too overwhelming for me. So we started with mindful tea-drinking. My challenge was to drink one cup a day, paying attention to all the sensations of taste, touch and smell, and returning to these whenever I noticed my mind descending into tangles of thought as it desperately tried to crack the problem of "What is happening to me and why? And what can I possibly do about it?"

What was happening to me? Before the depression set in, life had looked and felt pretty good. In my mid- twenties, I had been deputy editor of one of the best-selling magazines in Europe, having graduated with flying colors from what is generally regarded as a top university. I had good friends, sometimes girlfriends, and the kind of lifestyle that many people my age would have envied. I worked long hours, but that included traveling to fancy hotels in exotic locations to organize photo shoots, attending parties with complimentary drinks, interviewing actors and actresses, sports stars and musicians, and coming up with ideas for stupid stories to amuse young men. Then, between games of pool, I'd commission writers to draft the features that my colleagues and I had dreamed up on a whim—whatever tickled our cynical and deprecating senses of humor. This was the late 1990s, when men's lifestyle magazines were at the height of

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their popularity, and there was a kind of unthinking fun to be had by those who worked on them. But while the free clothes and watches, the glamour and the prestige, the careless laughter, the buzz of thrill-seeking satisfied a certain shallow craving for pleasure, under the surface my life was not so enjoyable.

I had a series of romantic relationships, but they rarely lasted more than a few months. I had a seemingly fabulous career, but it masked an undercurrent of yearning for something more, although I had no idea what that something might be. I frequently batted away feelings of hollowness and melancholy, as well as vague premonitions of a fearful future. I was lonely, and when the parties ended I'd try to keep the worry away by playing myself at darts, drinking vodka and spacing out watching sports on the TV. But the more I tried to fill the days and nights with pleasure, the more the darkness loomed at the edges of my mind. Questions about the meaning of existence started to creep in, accompanied by nervous rumblings in my gut, especially during rare moments of quiet, which I tried to keep to a minimum.

I seemed to function well enough most of the time, surviving on the surface. Only a few times did the veneer crack, usually after a girlfriend's rejection. Whenever this happened, anger and fear would shoot through my body, along with the sudden racing of a mind yelping from hurt, desperately searching for an exit from suffering. This sudden and scary automatic reaction would usually last for a few weeks or months, during which time I would barely eat or sleep, consumed by obsessive thoughts about how to put things right. The volcano of emotion would eventually subside, sometimes as a result of a new relationship, or by resurrecting the old one. Or there might be another form of distraction—perhaps a promotion or a holiday in the sun.

But the patch jobs and distractions ultimately failed to do the trick. Soon after the turn of the millennium, another fledgling relationship came to an abrupt end, and this time my escape tactics couldn't divert me from the pain. There was no one new on the horizon. Attempts to throw myself into work projects didn't satisfy: the

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conveyor belt of gadgets, models and puerile jokes was starting to lose its appeal—something in me called for an engagement of heart. A comfortable flat share with an old friend was also coming to an end, and I was secretly scared of living alone.

Loss of girlfriend, loss of companionship, loss of professional identity. Combined, it all felt too much to bear. It was like I'd been strapped to an out-of-control helicopter: my stomach lurched up and down as catastrophic thoughts ("You're going mad. This is a disaster . . . ") rattled through my head in a crazed, repeating loop. Muscles were frozen in terror, fingers trembled, and my breath hardened to a shallow pant.

Seeing no way out, I collapsed. Or rather, the rickety façade that I thought was "me" collapsed. After several weeks at work trying to pretend everything was fine, I called in sick, unable to face another week of going to the bathroom every twenty minutes to cry, fruitlessly berating myself to "get it together." But at home, things only got worse. Now I had all day to lie in bed or pace up and down, fretfully running through what was going wrong and how I might put it right. I passed the time chain-smoking (another futile diversion technique) and calling friends, family and even the Samaritans, hoping someone might offer an antidote to the poison that was eating me. Was I suicidal? No, but I desperately wanted the pain to stop.

It didn't stop for quite a while. Over the following two-and-a-half years, I went on a frantic quest to discover the cause of my symptoms, and how to be rid of them. Yet, the more I focused on the problem, the worse it became. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't seem to change. I went into therapy, attended support groups, took antidepressants, tried alternative treatments like acupuncture and biodynamic massage, and toyed with lifestyle changes—moving house or changing friends. I couldn't see that each time I rushed into the next support group, therapy session or self-help treatise, I was actually pushing away the peace I craved. I was trying to force myself into a future state of calm, but the forcing itself kept the tension in place. The more I tried to fight or run from fear and rumination, the

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more I fueled a pattern of aversion, a hatred of the present that made me feel worse, impelling me to fight or run even more. No matter what I changed in my external life, no matter what I tried to change in my psyche, I remained stuck in a pattern of resistance to the moment. I woke up each morning and went to bed each night depressed, scared, frustrated and tired.

Finally, in yet another desperate attempt to find happiness, I came to mindfulness meditation. Recognizing that her student was extremely stressed, my first instructor proposed a very gentle regime. I followed it to the letter and, for the first time since I had toppled into depression, felt like something might be shifting. Of course, the gloom didn't lift immediately, but I could sense that my mindset was starting to move. Instead of always trying to improve a situation through struggle or avoidance, I began to understand that there was maybe no need for so much to happen. Maybe my challenge was not to push with grit and determination, but to learn to *be with* whatever was going on—to allow anxiety, helplessness and racing thoughts, rather than try to shove them out of consciousness.

And so I continued, first with more mindful cups of tea, then with two, five, ten or even sometimes fifteen minutes of sitting meditation each day. I tried to allow whatever thoughts and feelings were present, using the breath as an anchor to which I could return, whenever the mind wandered off. I tried to remember that there was no goal, so it was impossible to fail. All I had to do was keep returning to the breath, with gentleness and patience, noticing what was happening without making judgements, seeing the experience as neither good nor bad.

Every other approach I'd tried had seemed to be about someone offering a fix or about me learning how to repair myself. Here, the view was that nothing was really wrong, so there was no problem to be sorted out. At worst, I was merely confused about how to live well; and the first step out of that confusion was to realize how it functioned, through the practice of mindfulness.

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MINDFULNESS PRACTICE: TURNING TOWARDS DIFFICULTY

By practicing mindfulness, coming back to focus when the mind wanders, we are training in presence, irrespective of whether our experience is enjoyable. It's normal to feel some discomfort while meditating—be it a physical pain, a difficult emotion, or an unpleasant thought. By gently returning attention to the breath or the whole body, we learn to manage these experiences wisely, consciously moving attention to a centered place of steady presence, rather than reacting automatically.

And in the practice outlined below, we take the next step in undoing the habits of grasping and aversion by shifting attention gently *towards* the unpleasant experience. We practice this by "being with it," neither getting sucked into the stories that drag us into rumination, nor trying to stop or avoid the feeling of what is troubling us. Instead, we move attention compassionately into the experience. Remember to be gentle. If what comes up is overwhelming, this may not be the best practice for you right now. If in doubt, seek the guidance of an experienced mindfulness teacher.

A PRACTICE FOR BEING WITH WHAT IS

1. Take an upright, dignified, relaxed sitting posture, and practice mindfulness of breathing for a few minutes. Follow this with a period of mindfulness of body practice, opening awareness to body sensations, as they arise.
2. Do you notice any unpleasant aspects of experience that are present at the moment? Are you feeling discomfort or pain anywhere in the body? If so, where? What about difficult emotions? If there are some, ask yourself where they are and which sensations appear. Be aware of any tightness, pressure, restlessness, heat, throbbing and so on. Bring attention gently to the thoughts in your mind. Are these pleasant or unpleasant? Notice any reactions to arising sensations or thoughts. Are you

tending to pull away from them, get annoyed by them, ruminate on them, or are you reacting in some other way? Without buying into them or trying to stop them, simply notice these reactions with kindness and interest.

3. Now, turn your attention towards an unpleasant sensation, a region of intensity in the body. It could be a subtle sensation or more pronounced. With gentleness, direct the mind's eye to this area and tune into what you find. Allow yourself to feel whatever sensation is there, softly.

You could imagine breathing into the sensation as you inhale, and breathing out from it as you exhale, letting it be experienced with the rhythm and flow of the breath. Without trying to change it in any way; just offer it a kind space in which to happen. See if you can let go of any attempt to eliminate it or distract from it. Just offer your curiosity, being with it, moment by moment. Is the sensation moving at all, shifting in location, intensity or quality? Notice any thoughts that arise in relation to the feeling, and let these pass through in the background of awareness, without trying to follow or stop them. Let go of trying to think your way out of the difficult experience. Just let it be, embracing it as compassionately as you can.

This blogpost is an extract from Into The Heart of Mindfulness, by Ed Halliwell. The book explores many of the themes Ed has written about in his Mindful.org posts over the last five years, and we will be publishing a few more extracts from it over the summer. You can also read a recent Telegraph interview with Ed about his journey into mindfulness here.

ED HALLIWELL

Ed Halliwell is a mindfulness teacher and writer, based in Sussex and London, UK. He is author of three books: Into The Heart of Mindfulness, How To Live Well By Paying Attentionand (as co-author)The Mindful Manifesto and teaches courses and retreats to public groups, in organizations and to individuals, face-to-face and online via Skype. He is also an advisor to The Mindfulness Initiative, which is supporting the Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group to develop mindfulness-based policies for the UK.

10 Mindful Attitudes That Decrease Anxiety

By exerting more conscious control over our behaviors and attitudes, we learn to work with our intention, wise effort, and capacity to be kind to ourselves. **By Bob Stahl**

Mindfulness is, in short, the practice of being aware of what's happening or what you're experiencing in the present moment. It's being here and now without judgment. This is a capacity that all human beings possess. Whenever you bring awareness to what you're directly experiencing via your senses, or to your state of mind via your thoughts and emotions, you're being mindful.

Although more research is needed to illuminate the mechanisms at work, it's clear that mindfulness allows us to interrupt automatic, reflexive fight, flight, or freeze reactions—reactions that can lead to anxiety, fear, foreboding, and worry. By bringing mindfulness to our actual experience in the moment, we can increase the likelihood of exerting more conscious control over our behaviors and attitudes. In so doing we learn to work with our intention, wise effort, will, discipline, and capacity to be kind to ourselves. These are all resources that can be harnessed and cultivated.

With that in mind, there are certain attitudes that play an important role when working with anxiety mindfully. These attitudes are central to mindfulness, and fostering them will help you develop and sustain your practice. It's similar to adding nutrients to the soil to cultivate a vibrant and healthy garden. By attending to the attitudes of mindfulness, you can support your practice and help it flourish. And just as a well-tended garden bears seeds and fruit, so too will practicing mindfulness help foster all of the attitudes of mindfulness. Keep in mind that you may find slightly different lists of the attitudes of mindfulness in other places. Below are the qualities that we believe all play an important role in working with *anxiety* mindfully.

10 ATTITUDES OF MINDFULNESS

1. **Volition or intention** is the foundation that supports all of the other attitudes. Your intention, will, or volition is what sets you on the mindful path to working within yourself to gradually transform your anxiety and find more ease, freedom, and peace. By bringing intention to working with anxiety, you're developing persistence in seeing yourself as whole, capable, and resourceful.
2. **Beginner's mind** is an aspect of mind that's open to seeing from a fresh perspective. Meeting anxiety in this way, with curiosity, can play an extremely important role in transforming your experience. When you're willing to adopt another point of view, new possibilities arise, and this can help you challenge habitual anxious thoughts and feelings.
3. **Patience** is a quality that supports perseverance and fortitude when feelings of anxiety are challenging. Patience offers a broader perspective, allowing you to see that moments of anxiousness will pass in time.
4. **Acknowledgment** is the quality of meeting your experience as it is. For example, rather than trying to accept or be at peace with anxiety, you meet it and your experience of it as they are. You can

acknowledge that anxiety is present and how much you don't like it, even as you apply patience and see anxiety as your current weather system, knowing it will pass.

5. **Nonjudgment** means experiencing the present moment without the filters of evaluation. In the midst of anxiety, it can be all too easy to experience a secondary layer of judgment on top of the already uncomfortable anxious feelings. Stepping out of a judgmental mind-set allows you to see more clearly. When you let go of evaluations, many sources of anxiety simply fade away. When you feel anxiety, adopting a nonjudgmental stance can reset your mind into a more balanced state.

6. **Nonstriving** is the quality of being willing to meet any experience as it is, without trying to change it. With nonstriving, you understand the importance of being with things as they are—being with your experience without clinging to or rejecting what's there. (Note that nonstriving relates to your present-moment experiences during meditation and doesn't in any way negate the value of setting a wise intention to grow, learn, and change your relationship to anxiety.) In the midst of strong anxiety, the first response is often to flee or get out of the situation. If you can pause and really be with your experience without exerting any force against it, you gain the opportunity to know your experience more clearly and choose your response. You can also become less fearful of the physical sensations, thoughts, and emotions that accompany anxiety.

7. **Self-reliance** is an important quality for developing inner confidence. With practice, you can learn to trust yourself and your ability to turn toward your anxiety or any other uncomfortable feeling. In turning toward these feelings, it's important to bring other qualities of mindfulness to your experience, allowing the feelings, acknowledging them, and letting them be.

8. **Letting be or allowing** is similar to nonstriving. It's a quality

that gives space to whatever you encounter in the moment. For example, if anxiety comes up as you meditate, you could choose to work with it by allowing the feeling to be there. In time, you can learn to ride a wave of anxiety until it dissipates, just as a storm runs its course in the sky.

9. **Self-compassion** is a beautiful quality of meeting yourself with kindness. Yet, sadly, so many people are their own greatest adversaries. Most of us probably would never treat another person the way we sometimes treat ourselves. Self-compassion will naturally grow as you practice meditation. And bringing this quality into your experience of anxiety can be like being your own best friend in the midst of hardship, offering your hand in a moment when help is needed. As your self-compassion grows, you will come to know that you are there for yourself, and your anxiety will naturally decrease.

10. **Balance and equanimity** are related qualities that foster wisdom and provide a broader perspective so that you can see things more clearly. From this perspective, you understand that all things change and that your experience is so much wider and richer than temporary experiences of anxiety and other difficulties.

MINDFULNESS PRACTICE:

Take some time right now to slowly reread the descriptions of the attitudes of mindfulness. After reading each one, pause and reflect upon what it means to you, especially as you begin to work with anxiety. Take a moment to try on each attitude and see how it feels. As you do so, tune in to how you feel in your body, mind, and emotions. Finally, after trying on each attitude, briefly describe your experience, noting how it felt. For example, did it feel natural or easy to adopt a particular attitude, or was it difficult? If it was difficult, why might that be? Was the attitude unfamiliar, or did you feel yourself resisting it in some way?

Calming the Rush of Panic in Your Body

How to create space between you and what you're experiencing in order to decrease anxiety and worry. **By Bob Stahl**

Anxiety softens when we can create a space between ourselves and what we're experiencing. Stephen Covey reiterates Victor Frankl's powerful insight and possibility: "Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space lies our freedom and our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our happiness."

When you react in ways that aren't mindful, they can gradually grow into habits that are detrimental to your health and well-being. Consequently, these patterns of reactivity further your suffering or distress. This is why it's so important to discern clearly the difference between reacting with unawareness and responding with mindfulness. When you become aware of the present moment, you gain access to resources you may not have had before. You may not be able to change a situation, but you can mindfully change your response to it. You can choose a more constructive and productive way of dealing with stress rather than a counterproductive or even destructive way of dealing with it.

In regard to panic, when you become mindful that you are in a state of panic, you can begin to respond to it in a way that lessens its intensity rather than inflaming or fueling it. As your practice of mindfulness deepens, you can gradually prevent panic attacks from even occurring and begin to feel much more deeply at ease within yourself and in the world.

TAKE IT SLOW

So that you feel safe, before you begin, we'd like to offer some gentle suggestions regarding meditation and other practices. Please tread lightly. Meditations, and other practices are meant not to create more panic or pressure in your life but as a way to help you practice engaging with panic in safe and relatively comfortable surroundings. Know that you can stop at any time. Please take care of yourself in the best way you need to.

Remember: easy does it; one step at a time. Slowly and gradually you can learn to live with more ease.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MINDFUL BREATHING

Mindful breathing is part of the foundation of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction and often our first recommendation to anyone living with the challenges of panic. It involves diaphragmatic or abdominal breathing, also known as belly breathing, which is very helpful in calming the body because it's the way that you naturally breathe when asleep or relaxed.

Explore your breath:

- Take a moment right now to be mindful of your breath. Gently place your hands on your belly.
- Breathe normally and naturally. When you breathe in, simply be aware that you're breathing in; when you breathe out, be aware that you're breathing out.

- Feel your belly rise and fall with your breath. Now take two more mindful breaths and then continue reading.

The reason why diaphragmatic or abdominal breathing is an "anti-panic/anxiety" breath is because it helps regulate irregular breathing patterns fairly quickly. Often when you feel panicked, your breathing will become rapid, irregular, and shallow. You'll tend to breathe mostly in your chest and neck. When you shift to diaphragmatic breathing, this will help regulate the breath so you can begin to feel more balanced and relaxed.

FOUNDATIONAL PRACTICE: MINDFUL BREATHING

Find a quiet place where you can be undisturbed. Turn off your phone and any other devices that might take you away from this special time that you're giving yourself. Assume a posture in which you can be comfortable and alert, whether sitting in a chair or on a cushion or lying down.

You can learn mindful breathing by following the script below, pausing briefly after each paragraph. Aim for a total time of at least five minutes.

1. **Appreciate Your Time.** Take a few moments to congratulate yourself that you are taking some time for meditation.
2. **Become aware of your breath.** Now bring awareness to the breath in the abdomen or belly, breathing normally and naturally.
3. **Stay with your breath.** As you breathe in, be aware of breathing in; as you breathe out, be aware of breathing out. If it is helpful, place your hands on your belly to feel it expand with each inhalation and contract with each exhalation. Simply maintaining this awareness of the breath, breathing in and breathing out. If you are unable to feel the breath in your belly, find some other way—place your hands on your chest, or feel the movement of air in and out of your nostrils.

4. **Just be.** There's no need to visualize, count, or figure out the breath. Just being mindful of breathing in and out. Without judgment, just watching, feeling, experiencing the breath as it ebbs and flows. There's no place to go and nothing else to do. Just being in the here and now, mindful of your breathing, living life one inhalation and one exhalation at a time.

5. **Feel what your body is doing naturally.** As you breathe in, feel the abdomen or belly expand or rise like a balloon inflating, then feel it receding or deflating or falling on the exhalation. Just riding the waves of the breath, moment by moment, breathing in and out.

6. **Acknowledge your wandering mind.** From time to time, you may notice that your attention has wandered from the breath. When you notice this, just acknowledge that your mind wandered and acknowledge where it went, and then bring your attention gently back to the breath.

7. **Be where you are.** Remember, there is no other place to go, nothing else you need to do, and no one you have to be right now. Just breathing in and breathing out. Breathing normally and naturally, without manipulating the breath in any way, just being aware of the breath as it comes and goes.

8. **Acknowledge your time.** As you come to the end of this meditation, congratulate yourself that you took this time to be present and that you are directly cultivating inner resources for healing and well-being. Let us take a moment to end this meditation with the wish "May all beings be at peace."

HOW TO PRACTICE MINDFUL BREATHING

Give yourself the gift of formally practicing this meditation every day, even for a short period of time. It might be helpful to start off practicing mindful breathing for five minutes once a day and build it up from there. Maybe you'll find that you can add a second or even

a third five-minute session, practicing mindful breathing at different times of your day. You can get additional benefit if you gradually extend your mindful breathing to ten, fifteen, twenty, or even thirty minutes at least once a day. Let this be a part of your practice of mindfulness that you look forward to doing, a special time for you to center yourself and "return home" to your being. Feel free to use an alarm clock or timer; you can download free meditation timers from the Insight Meditation Center that feature a pleasant sound.

Like other meditations, mindful breathing can be incorporated into your daily activities too. As far as where to practice informally, just about anywhere works. Take a few minutes at home, at work, at the doctor's office, at the bus stop, or even while waiting in line to bring a little mindful breathing into your life. You can also make it a habit to take a few mindful breaths right after you wake up, when you take a morning break, at lunchtime, in the afternoon, at night, or right before you go to sleep. Once you've practiced mindful breathing at these times, you can experiment with using it when you're feeling some angst, to help you calm the rush of panic in your body.

This article was adapted from Calming the Rush of Panic, by Bob Stahl PhD, Wendy Millstine NC.

A Meditation on Anxious Emotions

This practice involves deep investigation into the causes of anxious feelings so you can discover the story lines that trigger and drive your emotions.

By Bob Stahl

This practice involves deep investigation into the causes of anxious feelings. Through this practice, you can discover the storylines that tend to trigger and drive your emotions. Although it may sometimes feel as though your anxiety comes out of nowhere, it usually has a source—typically some combination of conditioning, self-stories, memories, thoughts, and buried emotions.

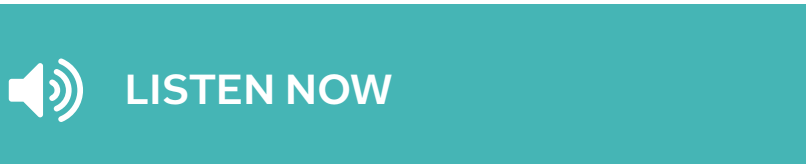
That said, when you practice this meditation, don't try to force yourself to find the source or meaning of your anxiety. The crucial aspect of this meditation is forwarding your journey of discovery into yourself. Whatever you may find inside, simply acknowledging it will help you live with more ease. Then, rather than putting so much energy into fighting your anxiety, you can begin to change your relationship to it.

Because this practice involves intentionally exploring the experience of anxiety, it can be challenging. Before you do this practice, please

take a little time to consider whether you're feeling up to it, listening to your inner voice to determine whether it feels right for you at this time. Consider doing your first practice when you feel safe and curious and have the energy and time to explore your anxiety more deeply. If now is not the time, be sure to return to this practice later, when you feel willing to take it on.

To allow you to fully experience this meditation, we recommend that you listen to the audio version. However, you can also simply read the text below. If you choose to do so, read through the entire script first to familiarize yourself with the practice, then do the practice, referring back to the text as needed and pausing briefly after each paragraph. Take about twenty minutes for the practice. You can do this practice in a seated position, standing, or even lying down. Choose a position in which you can be comfortable and alert.

A MEDITATION ON ANXIOUS EMOTIONS



1. Begin with a brief mindful check-in, taking a few minutes to acknowledge how you're currently feeling in your body and mind... being mindful of whatever is in your awareness and letting it all be. There's nothing that needs to be fixed, analyzed, or solved. Just allow your experience and let it be. Being present.
2. Now gently shift your attention to the breath, becoming mindful of breathing in and out. Bring awareness to wherever you feel the breath most prominently and distinctly, perhaps at your nose, in your chest, or in your belly, or perhaps somewhere else. There's no other place you need to go... nothing else you need to do... just being mindful of your breath flowing in and out. If your mind wanders away from the breath, just acknowledge wherever it

went, then return to being mindful of breathing in and out.

3. Now reflect on a specific experience of anxiety, perhaps something recent so you can remember it more clearly. It doesn't have to be an extreme experience of anxiety, perhaps something that you'd rate at 5 or 6 on a scale of 1 to 10. Recall the experience in detail, as vividly as you can, invoking some of that anxiety now, in the present moment.

4. As you imagine the experience and sense into it, be mindful of how the anxiety feels in your body and stay present with the sensations. Your only job right now is to feel and acknowledge whatever physical sensations you're experiencing in your body and let them be. There's no need to change them. Let the sensations run their course, just like a ripple on a lake is gradually assimilated into the entirety of the body of water.

5. Now feel into any emotions that emerge...anxiety, fear, sadness, anger, confusion...whatever you may feel. As with physical sensations, just acknowledge how these emotions feel and let them be. There's no need to analyze them or figure them out.

6. If strong emotions don't arise, this doesn't mean you aren't doing this meditation correctly. The practice is simply to acknowledge whatever is in your direct experience and let it be. Whatever comes up in the practice is the practice.

7. Bringing awareness to your anxiety may sometimes amplify your anxious feelings. This is normal, and the intensity will subside as you open to and acknowledge what you're experiencing and give it space to simply be.

8. Continue feeling into the anxiety, just allowing any feelings in the body and mind and letting them be, cultivating balance and the fortitude to be with things as they are. The very fact that you're acknowledging anxiety rather than turning away from it is healing.

9. As you continue to acknowledge your physical sensations and emotions, they may begin to reveal a host of memories, thoughts, feelings, and physical experiences that may have created limiting definitions of who you think you are. You may begin to see more clearly into how these old patterns of conditioning have driven your anxiety. This understanding can set you free—freer than you ever felt possible.
10. Now gradually transition back to the breath, breathing mindfully in and out... Next, slowly shift your awareness from your breath to sensing into your heart. Take some time to open into your heart with self-compassion, acknowledging your courage in engaging with your anxiety. In this way, your anxiety can become your teacher, helping you open your heart to greater wisdom, compassion, and ease within your being.
11. As you're ready to end this meditation, congratulate yourself for taking this time to meditate and heal yourself. Then gradually open your eyes and return to being present in the environment around you. May we all find the gateways into our hearts and be free.

MINDFUL JOURNALING

Right after your first practice of this meditation, take a few moments to write about your experience. How did it go for you? How did you work with what came up within your body, thoughts, and emotions? And how are you feeling right now?

This article has been adapted from A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook for Anxiety by Bob Stahl PhD, Florence Meleo-Meyer MS, MA, and Lynn Koerbel MPH.

BOB STAHL

Bob Stahl, PhD, has founded seven Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction programs in medical centers in the San Francisco Bay Area and is currently offering programs at Dominican Hospital and El Camino Hospitals in Los Gatos and Mt. View. Dr. Stahl serves as a Senior Teacher for Oasis Institute for Mindfulness-Based Professional Education and Training at the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Bob is coauthor of 5 books: A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook, Living With Your Heart Wide Open, Calming the Rush of Panic, A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook for Anxiety, and MBSR Everyday. Bob is the guiding teacher at Insight Santa Cruz and a visiting teacher at Spirit Rock.