



Stretching and breathing meditation

This is guided meditation that involves performing simple stretching movements in a standing position, and then moving on to meditate in a sitting position. The exercise focuses on being aware of what happens from one moment to another, without evaluation or judgement.

The stretches will help you study your body while it's in motion, in a very gentle way. This is more about observation than success or failure. Use a sense of curiosity to observe what happens in the body from one moment to another. You can try closing your eyes at times and then keeping them open again.

Find a place where you can have some privacy. Stand with your legs at hip width and knees slightly bent. Let your arms hang loosely by your sides. Hold your head up so that your whole body is aligned vertically. Your posture expresses alertness and presence but not stiffness. Let your shoulders drop and relax.

While standing there, remind yourself of the purpose of this exercise. Rather than trying to reach your limits, you will simply try to identify the physical sensations and feelings felt in your body when you do these gentle stretches. Respect the limits of your body at all times. Do your best to avoid pushing yourself too hard. Remember this especially if you currently have any physical problems in your body. It's important to remain still or only move slightly when you feel this way. Foster awareness of your body just the way it is, both when stationary and when in motion.

First, concentrate on breathing. Notice how the breathing feels in your abdomen and stomach, and in the areas around your belly button. Sense your breathing as you inhale and exhale.

As you inhale, raise your arms to your sides above your shoulders and above your head.

Hold them above your head, stretching them towards the ceiling and continue breathing. Pay attention to whether the sensations and feelings in your body change according to the breathing when you maintain this position.

Notice sensations in your muscles and joints all over your body from your feet, calves and thighs to your back, shoulders, arms, hands and fingers. Also notice if you feel tension or discomfort in any place.

If you do feel unpleasant sensations, also open up to them as you breathe. Exhale, and relax from the stretch while you lower your arms back down. Lower your arms very slowly. Bend your wrists so that your fingers are pointing upwards, and your palms are pushing outwards. Continue to lower your arms very, very slowly.

Spend some time becoming aware of how the sensations change with the movement, until your arms eventually return to the resting position. When your arms are at your sides again, study the effects of the stretch.



If your eyes were open, you could close them at this point and prepare to notice the sensations in your body at this very moment. Be aware of these sensations as well as the sensations that breathing causes in your stomach area.

Next, raise your right hand to a stretch above your head. Lift it like you were trying to pick a piece of fruit that you can't quite reach.

You might notice that your left heel rises off the floor when you reach up.

Now, notice how the stretch feels in your right arm and right armpit and right side while stretching your hand upwards. Open your eyes and look past your hand in the direction that it's pointing.

When exhaling, let your heel return to the ground and slowly lower your right arm until it is resting at the side of your body. Let your eyes close and feel the sensations in your body. How does it feel to stretch this way?

Stand still and breathe. While inhaling, raise your left hand up as if reaching up to pick a piece of fruit. Open your eyes and look over your left hand towards the imaginary piece of fruit that you can't quite reach. This time your right heel may rise off the ground when you reach upwards.

Notice the effects of the stretch throughout your body: In your arm? In your armpit? In your left side? Be aware of all these sensations.

When exhaling, let your left heel return to the ground so that the entire sole of your foot is on the ground and let your arm fall very, very slowly until it's beside your body. Stand in this position, breathe and become aware of the effects that you feel in your body after the stretch.

Remember to respect your own limits all the time and don't try to overstretch. This is not a competition.

It is not about succeeding or failing. This is simply an opportunity to move your body and become aware of sensations. It is a chance to be present in your body as you're standing here, moving your body and breathing.

When you're ready, inhale and raise both hands upwards once again. They move upwards,

rise above your shoulders and eventually over your head. Keep your arms and hands in the same direction, just as you did earlier. Then tilt your arms to the right and let your pelvis move to the left so that your body forms a large curve from your legs and through the upper body to your arms, hands and fingers. Notice how the left side of your body stretches and how the right side of your body is slightly compressed when you're in this position.

When you're ready, inhale and then return to the middle position and remain there for a moment. Exhale and start to stretch your right side. Tilt your arms and upper body to the left and move your pelvis to the right so that your right side stretches out and the left



side is slightly compressed. Observe how this feel. What can you sense right now? Breathe along with the sensations.

Inhale and return to the middle position and lower your arms very slowly. Breathe the whole time until your arms are down and hanging freely at the sides of your body and your shoulders are relaxed. Keep your feet firmly on the ground. Keep your head up and breathe. Be aware of all the sensations in your body as you stand here.

Now you're going to rotate your shoulders in four stages. First bring your shoulders up as if you were trying to reach your ears with them. Then move them backwards as if you were trying to make your shoulder blades touch each other. Then let your shoulders fall right down. Finally, bring them forward again as if you were trying to bring them together in front of your body.

Now do these four stages one after the other as a single movement so that you're rotating your shoulders upwards, backwards, downwards and forward. Do this movement at your own pace. You might inhale for half of the movement and exhale for the other half. Change the direction after a while and rotate your shoulders in the opposite direction. Move your shoulders and breathe at the same time, breathing in and out.

Now return to the resting position. Prepare to sense how it feels now that you've stretched your shoulder area. Do you feel tension? See if the tension eases as you exhale.

Now let's move on to stretching the head and neck. This movement has three stages. Start by pressing your chin down onto your chest and let your head hang there. Then slowly tilt your head to the left so that your left ear moves closer to your left shoulder while your shoulder remains relaxed. Then slowly move your head to the opposite side so that your right ear is closer to your right shoulder. Then move your head back towards your chest. Do this semi-circular movement slowly. Bring your head towards one shoulder. Then towards the other. Then down towards your chest. If you want, you can breathe in time with the movement. Inhale for half the movement and exhale for the other half. You can change direction at some point if you want to.

Then finish the movement and stand in the original position. Notice what effects the stretch has on your head and neck.

Be aware of the sensations caused by the stretch and the sensations that breathing produces in your abdomen. Let your body be just as it is. Next, you'll move from a standing to a sitting position. Be aware of each movement as you change positions so that the change is also part of the meditation.

Slowly move to sit on a chair, pillow or stool and find a comfortable position. If you're sitting on a chair, sit so that your legs are not crossed, and the soles of your feet are flat on the floor. Sit without touching the back of the chair so that your body is self-supporting. Your back, neck and head are all aligned. Sit in a vertical and dignified position without being stiff. Sit in a position that best supports your intention to remain alert. Remain present.

Now focus on your diaphragm. How does breathing feel in your diaphragm? Notice how the physical sensations change in your diaphragm as air enters your body when inhaling



and as it leaves your body when exhaling. You might notice a short break between inhaling and exhaling and between exhaling and the next time you inhale. You don't need to control your breathing or breathe in any particular way. Let your breathing continue at its own pace.

Focus on the sensations caused by inhaling for a few breaths. Then change your focus from inhaling to exhaling for the next few breaths. Concentrate on the sensations produced by exhaling. What sensations do you observe when exhaling? Now focus on inhaling and exhaling and be conscious of the breathing movement as a whole, noticing how the air flows in and flows out.

Whenever you notice your mind wandering away from breathing, when you notice yourself daydreaming, planning, or reminiscing, you may congratulate yourself on being aware. You have returned to the present by simply noticing that your mind wandered.

Did you notice where your mind was? Gently bring your attention back to breathing. Be aware of your inhalations and exhalations. Do this every time your mind wanders. Even if it happens 100 times, every time [4j](#) just bring your mind back to breathing and start again from that point.

In this way you can use breathing as an anchor that takes you back to the present moment each time you notice your mind wandering. Consider the recurring wandering of your mind as an opportunity to take a patient and curious attitude towards your experiences.

Now continue to practice on your own in a quiet place. Every once in a while, you can check whether your attention is still focused on breathing. Let your breathing flow in. Let your breathing flow out. Each breath is unique.

Concentrate on noticing the physical sensations caused by each breath and the breaks between your breaths. Occasionally remind yourself that you're not trying to achieve anything. You're not even trying to relax or keep thoughts out of your mind. Thoughts are not your enemy.

You're just resting in a peaceful state of mind. Examine the movements of your mind and simply let your mind be just the way it is. Don't try to direct your mind in some specific direction.

If your mind starts wandering again, simply observe its wandering. Then bring it gently back to breathing. The wandering of your mind is an opportunity to learn about its movements and to be amazed by how it functions. Then return to the breathing, which anchors us to this moment in time.

When it feels right, you can expand the scope of awareness around your breathing so that it covers your entire body while you're sitting in this position. Be aware of the sensations caused by breathing but also the other sensations that you feel in your body. You may notice how the soles of your feet are touching the ground.

How do your hands feel on your knees or in your lap? How do the parts of your thighs and buttocks that are touching the chair or stool feel? Observe the all the sensations that



occur with your sense of touch to the outside world or deeper inside your body. Be aware of all of them together.

You can scan your whole body if you want. Let each body part be the focus of your attention:

Lower legs and upper legs

Pelvic area

Lower back and stomach

Upper back and chest

Arms and hands

Shoulders and neck

Head and face

Sit here and be aware of your entire body.

As if your whole body were breathing.

At times during the meditation, you may become aware of an unpleasant feeling. You might feel physically uncomfortable or feel pain or aching in some place. If this happens, you can choose what to do next.

You can change positions to become more comfortable. If you decide to move, also let that movement be part of the exercise, part of meditation. Be aware of the intention to move, then the movement itself, and the post-movement effects. Moving doesn't mean that you're interrupting the meditation. This is just part of meditation. This is the first option if you feel uncomfortable.

The second option if you experience an unpleasant feeling is to remain in place and focus your attention on the very spot that feels unpleasant. You could imagine that the airflow when you inhale hits that part of your body and helps you examine and notice what is happening in there. You might notice that the unpleasant feeling consists of a whole group of sensations. Perhaps you feel some pulling or aching? Burning or pulsating, or anything else.

All these sensations can change from time to time. Not necessarily all at once, but at different times and in different ways. They are constantly changing. Use breathing to help focus your breathing on this body part. Use it to sense the changing sensations in a curious manner. Examine the sensations calmly. Don't try to change them in any way or improve the situation. If you have difficulty focusing on these sensations, let them go and focus once again on sensing how it feels to simply sit here.

Sense your entire body as you simply sit and breathe. Notice your body, sitting right here in the present moment. Be open to all the sensations in your body. Concentrate only on being aware of what your body is like right now in this moment. Continue to notice the sensations in the next moment and the one after that.



And now, as this exercise nears its end: bring your attention back to your diaphragm and focus on the sensations that breathing causes in the diaphragm. Prepare to be aware of all sensations every time you inhale and every time you exhale, and of the breaks between the breathes.

As you sit here breathing, you can congratulate yourself for using this time to become aware of what happens in a moment of presence. Breathing is always with you. You can use breathing to ground yourself at any time of the day. You can use it to feel a sense of balance, to accept yourself just the way you are.
