

Exercise 9 – Refocus to The Here & Now

This is a simple and effective exercise that brings your attention to the here and now, whilst expanding your window of awareness helping you become, over time, more able to notice everything around you.

You might consider Exercise 8 as one that aids ‘inner awareness’ and Exercise 9 as one that aids ‘outer awareness.’ You will need a pad and something to write with. There is a meditation exercise on the Cellular Attitude website for downloading as well.

First, turn off anything that can distract you like a mobile phone, television, radio, etc. Try and ensure you won’t have any interruptions (although when you are experienced at this, you will find that interruptions won’t affect you). Do not do this whilst operating machinery.

When you have done this, sit (or stand, if you are outside, for example) and concentrate on your breathing. It’s like meditation or the breath you aim for in Yoga: Pranayama.

When the Breath wanders, the mind is unsteady, but when the Breath is still, so is the mind still." - Hatha Yoga Pradipika

Our breathing is really affected by our emotional attitude. When we are upset or scared, we breathe quickly. When we are relaxed, we breathe slowly.

Conversely, our emotional attitude can really be affected by our breathing. Deep, slow breathing engenders a calmer, more positive attitude.

So, the start of this exercise is our breathing.

If you already practice Yoga, this next section might only serve as a refresher. If you have never tried Yoga, then the following section will be a very brief introduction to the Yoga breath, which is the fundamental starting point for all Yoga. (If you’ve never tried Yoga, please do, you will not regret it.)

If you are sitting, make sure you are comfortable and ensure you are sitting up with your back straight.

If you are standing, stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, with your arms hanging loosely by your sides. Your knees should not be locked straight, but loose with a little flex in them.

Close your eyes.

Focus each one of your senses on the physical aspects that are part of your body’s breathing actions.

Listen to the rhythmic sounds of each inhalation and exhalation, hear the difference between the two sounds as the air rushes in and is subsequently expelled.

Concentrate on your breathing.

- Inhale through your nose, fully, allowing the air to fill up your abdomen. Your stomach will extend, this is normal. (The key to deep breathing is to breathe deeply from the bottom of the abdomen, getting as much breath into your lungs as possible. When you take deep breaths from the abdomen, rather than shallow breaths from your upper chest, you inhale more oxygen. The more oxygen you get, the less short of breath and anxious you feel.)
- Pause for a second or two when you have reached the fullest inhalation.
- Exhale through your mouth (you might want to make a small whispered ‘aahhh’ as you exhale).
- Pause for a second or two when you have reached the fullest exhalation before inhaling again.

After a couple of minutes of breathing like this, you can't help but feel more relaxed and calmer, at peace. Continue this way until you feel fully alert and re-energised.

Open your eyes if they were closed and focus on something in the room or outside. Look at this item only. When you feel that you 'have' this item, add another to your focus. Now you should have two items to focus on. This can be hard initially as you're used to focussing on one item at a time. You can look at the new one, but don't lose the connection with the original item. As you progress in your ability to do this, you can get quite a few items on board. Experienced practitioners can widen their focus to well over twenty items. Being able to focus on many things at once means you have increased your capacity for mental awareness of the world around you.

For example, when driving you need to be aware of so many things around you so that you don't have an accident. If you can remember when you first started driving, it was easy to feel overwhelmed by having so many things to concentrate on at once. Driving lessons help you increase your awareness of the world outside the car: the more you drive, the more you can do this. It's a very similar process. It doesn't all need to be visual, but can also include sounds, smells, bodily sensations etc.

The more often you do this exercise, the better at it you'll get.

At some point in this exercise you will find your attention is fully in the here and now and you'll start to feel that there's lots to do and you'll feel motivated and excited to do it.

When you get to that stage, stop trying to focus on more items and go through all the things you want to do, in your mind. Visualise a successful outcome for each of them and as soon as you've done that, write down all the tasks and items you wish to deal with and list them as your goals. It is extremely important that you write these down.

With a list of identified goals that you've visualised succeeding in, you are equipped and motivated to do them. End the session and start on the first item in your list immediately.

It should take at least ten to twenty minutes to really get the full benefit of this, but it can take longer if there's a lot of processing to be done.

However, even five minutes can make improvements, and this can be added to your daily routine. Even if you're stuck in traffic, on the train, at the airport, you can use this breathing exercise to reduce stress and make yourself feel better. You can do it wherever you are and at any time. There are also long-term health benefits for doing so.

Your body has altered at a biochemical level. If you were in a stressed state, the fight or flight chemicals begin receding as you start relaxing. You exit the fight or flight response and enter what can be called the relaxation response.

Remember how logic and long-term strategic thinking had been banished by Fight or Flight? Well, in the Relaxation Response, they come back in full force. In fact, the more relaxed you are, the more enhanced your logic and strategic thinking becomes. Your thinking becomes clearer and sharper.

Your heart rate slows, your blood pressure stabilises, your stress hormones dissipate, your muscles relax, and some aches and pains are alleviated.

Your immune system is reactivated and revitalised. Your digestion resumes its peak performance and you get more essential nutrients out of the food you eat.

Bone re-building recommences, and your body renews itself.

As a result of these physical and chemical changes brought on by this routine, your mind becomes alert and is better able to focus on any problem.



Your capacity to receive, process and understand information increases noticeably. Your 'window of awareness' has grown in size considerably.