

Meditation for urge management and recovery

Posted by DavidT - 27 Jan 2020 17:40

Meditation is a great proven technique with a strong body of evidence and research to back up its effectiveness for urge management and recovery.

In fact many ex-porn users say it played a significant role in their battle to kick the habit. More than 100 studies have shown that the area of the brain that regulates emotions is larger in people who meditate.

Meditation increases dopamine levels by 65%, which helps combat the chronically low dopamine levels from which addicts suffer.

Meditation is also effective at preventing relapses with 47% of people using this technique not relapsing back into negative behavior patterns.

One the of types of Meditation is called "Mindfulness"

Mindfulness focuses on being in the now, an awareness of your thoughts, feelings and sensations.

How to do it:

Set aside at least 15 minutes to sit quietly, breathe deeply, paying attention to your body, observing how you feel. It is non-judgmental, but allows you to observe yourself.

- Sit comfortably, with your eyes closed and your spine reasonably straight.
- Direct your attention to your breathing.
- When thoughts, emotions, physical feelings or external sounds occur, simply accept them, giving them the space to come and go without judging or getting involved with them.
- When you notice that your attention has drifted off and become engaged in thoughts or feelings, simply bring it back to your breathing and continue.

The primary focus is your breathing. It's OK and natural for thoughts to arise, and for your attention to follow them. No matter how many times this happens, just keep bringing your

attention back to your breathing. Maintain a calm, non-judging awareness, allowing thoughts and feelings to come and go without getting enmeshed in them.

How Long to Practice?

It's recommended to start with 10 minutes a day for a beginner, and after a week increase it to 20 minutes a day.

Relaxation Practice

If you find yourself triggered and need to recollect yourself or just calm down, this practice works great and only takes 6 minutes.

- Breath in deep for a count of 6
- Breath out completely for a count of 6.
- Do this for about 6 minutes.

This practice will activate the parasympathetic nervous system while oxygenating the body. Producing a natural relaxation response and overall feeling of well being. It's a great practice for on the spot triggers, but also if done on a consistent basis.

What gets addicts in trouble is that we relive the past and worry too much about the future. Sometimes, subconsciously, feelings that we felt when we were younger come back to haunt us in adulthood, when we are triggered with the same emotion. Scientific studies of addictive behavior show that it is virtually impossible to relapse when you're concentrating on the present moment. As author Connie Lofgreen says in her excellent book titled, "The Storm of Sex Addiction – Rescue and Recovery," "When addicts incorporate regular meditation and other mindfulness practices into their daily routines, they progress more quickly and have stronger recoveries."

Reb Nachman of Breslov speaks about hisbodedus – a state of mind of simply sitting with oneself and contemplating. This may be what our sages were talking about when they said we should prepare for one hour before davening.

One area of mindfulness which helps addicts who are addicted to certain behaviors is to simply notice thoughts that enter your head. You don't have to act on the thoughts. Some days you'll have angry thoughts, sad thoughts or shameful thoughts. The more you dwell on them, the more they build up energy and tension in your body and you begin to feel restless, irritable and discontent.

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Sleep Meditation

Since staying awake while we're meditating is often a big challenge, it's no surprise that mindfulness has been shown to promote healthy sleep. It's not all that exciting to sit quietly and breathe. It can be downright calming. But that's not the whole story.

Mindfulness practice encourages nonjudgmental awareness—seeing things exactly as they are, with openness and curiosity. With sleep, as with meditation practice, intentions are easier said than done.

Neither sleep routines nor mindfulness practice responds well to a heavy hand. If you set out to force yourself into sleep, you're less likely to sleep. If you strain for some picture-perfect mindset when meditating, you'll create more stress and uncertainty. If you set yourself up with clear-sighted planning and patient resolve—intentionally but unforced—sleep and mindfulness are both more likely to follow.

In considering any meditation related to sleep, recognize that there's nothing to force, and nothing to make happen. Since striving makes sleep more challenging, set out to practice without specific expectations or goals. We cannot make ourselves sleep, but perhaps, by aiming to stay settled and getting less caught up in our thoughts, we fall asleep anyway.

For the meditation that follows, there will be no ending bell or instruction. At the end, continue to practice if you like, or hopefully enjoy a good night's rest instead.

1. *Start while lying down, allowing your legs to rest in a comfortable posture, hip-width apart. You can place your arms by your side or your hands on your belly.*
2. *Begin by noticing your breath. Pay attention, as best as you're able to the physical movement related to breathing, such as your belly rising and falling. Or, if you prefer, focus your attention more closely on the air moving in and out of your nose and mouth.*
3. *It's normal, expected even, to have thoughts — lots of them. Your mind rehashes the day or gets caught up in worrying about tomorrow. Recognize those habits, and then practice letting them be. Label whatever grabs your attention, and come back again to noticing the breath. Breathing in... and breathing out.*
4. *Notice if you get caught up in effort, or frustration, or fear, with compassion for yourself.*

Catch thoughts of self-criticism or frustration, and come back to just one breath, one more time. Thoughts are only thoughts. Breathing in... breathing out. There's nothing you need to fix or change right now in this moment. Notice where your thoughts go, and label them "thoughts." Come back to one next breath, over, and over again.

- 5. Shift attention to sensations in your body. Start by moving your awareness to physical sensations in your feet. You don't need to wiggle your toes or move your feet, just notice them — the temperature or the pressure of your heel against the blanket or the mat beneath you.*
- 6. From your feet, move your attention into your lower legs, noticing whatever there is to see. Letting go of a sense of effort or needing to make anything happen. And then from your lower legs, through your knees, and into your upper legs. If you feel any sense of stress or tension, aim to relax and let go.*
- 7. Then through your buttocks and pelvis, and into your belly and abdomen. You might notice a sense of your breath moving up and down, or other physical sensations, or sometimes even reflection of emotion (perhaps an emotion like fear or anger reflects in the stomach in the form of tension or tightness). And as you move from your belly and now into your chest, note each time your mind gets caught up in thoughts of discomfort or distraction. And then gently and with patience, guiding it back one more time.*
- 8. Move around into your back, certainly a place many of us hold tension in different ways, relaxing your muscles as best as you're able, lowering your shoulders from your ears. If you feel a need to make an adjustment, allow that to happen with intention, pausing and choosing your next action. Shift your attention into your hands and lower arms, again without actively needing to move or change anything, observing and letting go.*
- 9. Then moving through your neck and into the muscles of your face, perhaps noticing any locations of tightness or pinching, and then with gentleness, as best as you're able, relaxing those muscles. And then for a few moments, have a general awareness of physical sensations throughout your body.*
- 10. And now, if you're still awake, bring your attention back to the breath, each time the mind wanders into the past or into the future, or wherever it chooses to go. If it's a useful anchor for your attention, you can count breaths, breathing in, one, breathing out, one, breathing in, two, breathing out, two... When you reach ten, start at one again.*
- 11. If counting becomes a distraction, then just stay with the sensation of breathing — wherever you feel the breath entering or leaving your body, or the rising or falling of your belly and chest. Continue on your own now, counting breaths up to ten, patiently returning your attention whenever you become distracted. If you lose track of counting, that's fine. Start over wherever you last remember.*

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Other methods of meditation

There are many other methods of meditation, but in general it is defined as a formal exercise to cultivate compassion and awareness, with these qualities being seen as the foundation to a healthy and happy life. It is through the practice of the specific techniques listed below that we build stability of mind over time.

- **Focused attention.** This form of meditation is fairly straightforward because it uses the object of our breath to focus attention, to anchor the mind and maintain awareness. Notice your mind starting to wander? Simply return to the breath.
- **Body scan.** Often, our body is doing one thing while our mind is elsewhere. This technique is designed to sync body and mind by performing a mental scan, from the top of the head to the end of your toes. Imagine a photocopier light slowly moving over your body, bringing attention to any discomfort, sensations, tensions, or aches that exist.
- **Noting.** Whether you are focusing on the breath or simply sitting in quiet, this technique involves specifically “noting” what’s distracting the mind, to the extent that we are so caught up in a thought or emotion that we’ve lost our awareness of the breath (or whatever the object of focus is). We “note” the thought or feeling to restore awareness, create a bit of space, as a way of letting go, and to learn more about our thought patterns, tendencies, and conditioning.
- **Visualization.** This type of meditation invites you to picture something or someone in your mind — we are essentially replacing the breath with a mental image as the object of focus. It can feel challenging to some, but it’s really no different than vividly recalling the face of an old friend naturally, without effort. And so it is with meditation. By conjuring a specific visualization, we not only get to observe the mind, but we also get to focus on any physical sensations.
- **Loving kindness.** Focusing on the image of different people — it doesn’t matter if we know them or not, if we like them or not. We direct positive energy and goodwill first to ourselves, and then, as a ripple effect, to others, which helps us let go of unhappy feelings we may be experiencing.
- **Skillful compassion.** Similar to the loving kindness meditation technique, this one involves focusing on a person you know or love and paying attention to the sensations arising from the heart. By opening our hearts and minds for the benefit of other people, we have the opportunity to foster a feeling of happiness in our own mind.
- **Resting awareness.** Rather than focusing on the breath or a visualization, this technique involves letting the mind truly rest; thoughts may enter, but instead of distracting you and pulling you away from the present moment, they simply drift away.
- **Reflection.** This technique invites you to ask yourself a question: perhaps something such as, “What are you most grateful for?” (Note that asking yourself a question using the second person — you — will discourage the intellectual mind from trying to answer it rationally.) Be aware of the feelings, not the thoughts, that arise when you focus on the question.

- Mantra meditation. This technique is similar to focused attention meditation, although instead of focusing on the breath to quiet the mind, you focus on a mantra (which could be a syllable, word, or phrase). The idea here is that the subtle vibrations associated with the repeated mantra can encourage positive change — maybe a boost in self-confidence or increased compassion for others — and help you enter an even deeper state of meditation.

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