

BREATHE AMONG THE STARS



**Student
Well-Being**

MCDONALD CENTER

HOW MEDITATION WORKS

OBSERVING MIND

When we build time into our days to observe our thoughts, sensations, emotions, and surroundings, we strengthen the "observing mind." This practice allows us to observe our experiences and can rewire our brains in ways that support well-being. Meditation can decrease stress and emotional distress and strengthen our bodies' immune response, positive emotions, and our ability to sleep well.

Even a few minutes each day can have a benefit on well-being. Find a few moments to bring your attention into the present moment with the following breathing exercises.

Or try any of the many other ways to practice meditation.

The Calm app is a great place to start exploring

DID YOU KNOW?

Regular meditation increases gray matter! The areas of the brain impacted by meditation include the area that is connected to self-awareness, empathy, executive functioning, self-control, and stress management.



WE WILL BE MORE SUCCESSFUL IN ALL OUR ENDEAVORS IF WE CAN LET GO OF THE HABIT OF RUNNING ALL THE TIME, AND TAKE LITTLE PAUSES TO RELAX AND RE-CENTER OURSELVES. AND WE'LL ALSO HAVE A LOT MORE JOY IN LIVING.

— THICH NHAT HANH

Content adapted from: www.rickhanson.net/meditation

WHY BREATHING MATTERS

BREATH AND BODY

Breathing is often something we take for granted, not paying much attention to this automatic process. Our bodies keep us breathing to keep us alive, but when we pause to notice our breath, it's clear there's more to it.

Our breathing can change based on what is happening around or within us. If we are stressed or anxious, our breathing might become shallow and fast. If we're resting or relaxed, our breathing tends to slow and deepen.

By focusing on our breath or practicing a breathing exercise, we can calm our bodies and our minds. A deep breath or a centering practice can positively impact our entire body and is fundamental to well-being.

25,000

approximate number of breaths per day

"Research shows changing the way we breathe can influence weight, athletic performance, allergies, asthma, snoring, mood, stress, focus and so much more." *

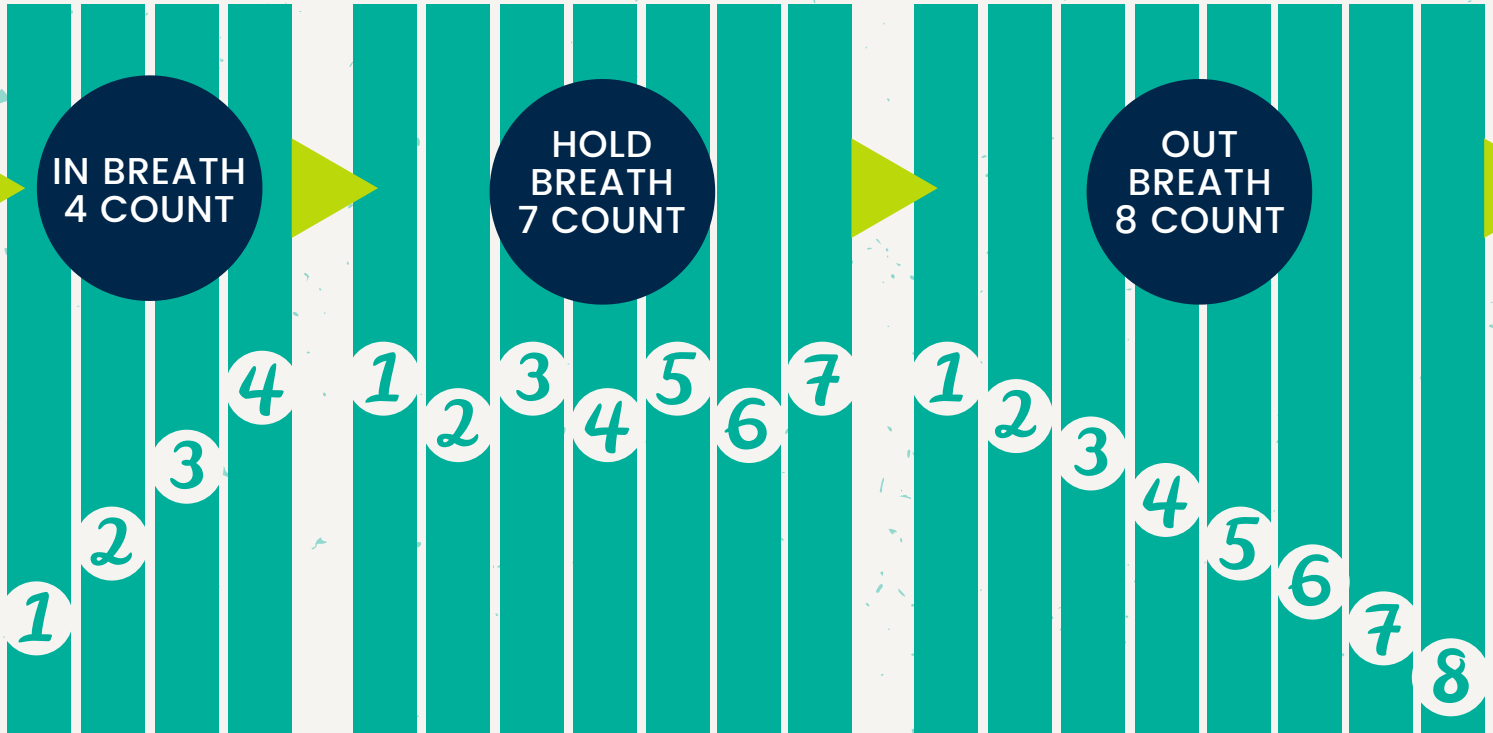
**BREATHE IN
DEEPLY TO
BRING YOUR
MIND HOME TO
YOUR BODY.**

– THICH NHAT HANH

4 - 7 - 8 BREATH

Deepening your out breath engages the parasympathetic nervous system and physiologically calms your body.

1. Breathe in for a count of 4.
2. Hold for a count of 7.
3. Breathe out for a count of 8.
4. Repeat 10-15 times or until calm.



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GROUNDING SENSES

Sometimes focusing on our breath can be more stressful than helpful. There are many other places we can focus our attention for a short, grounding practice.

1. Notice **five** things you can **see**. (Look around, bring your attention to things you might otherwise not notice.)
2. Notice **four** things you can **feel**. (Bring your attention to things you are currently feeling, such as the texture of your clothes.)
3. Notice **three** things you can **hear**. (Bring your attention to things you hear in the background.)
4. Notice **two** things you can **smell**. (Bring your attention to smells you might otherwise filter out.)
5. Notice **one** thing you can **taste**. (Focus on one thing you can taste right now, such as the taste in your mouth or a sip of your drink.)

5



4



3



2



1



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BODY SCAN

Taking a moment to check in with our bodies, focusing on where there is tension and inviting relaxation can be a very grounding experience.

1. Find a comfortable position for your body and close your eyes if you feel safe and comfortable to do so.
2. Begin by focusing your attention on your toes and feet. Notice any sensations. If there is tension or tightness, invite your muscles to relax.
3. Slowly shift your attention upward, through your legs, torso, arms, shoulders, neck and ending with your head. Spend as much or as little time on each area of your body as feels right for you.
4. After scanning your body, pause for a moment to offer a thought of gratitude for the many things your body allows you to accomplish and supports you in doing.

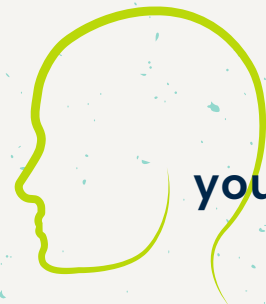
**Begin with
your toes.**



**Notice tension.
Invite relaxation.**



**End at
your head.**



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PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

Take a moment to reflect on gratitude and appreciation.

What are three things you did well today?

Make a list of ways you are able to help others.

What are three things you are grateful for today?

What is something you are looking forward to?

What is an accomplishment you are proud of?

Write about a happy memory.



PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

Take a moment to reflect on this semester.

What has gone well so far this semester? What successes have you had? What strengths did you use to achieve them?

Which experience has been most meaningful to you this semester? What are you most proud of?

Was there an opportunity you had that you didn't take? What prevented you from taking it? What do you need in place to take advantage of future opportunities?

Is there something you could have let go of to make time and/or space for something else important to you?

Who or what has supported you this semester? How have you supported others?

Overall, what would you do differently if you could? What regrets do you need to let go of?

