

## Mindfulness: Reduce Stress with Breathing and Meditation Poem Webinar Transcript

**NADIA:** Hi, I'm Nadia and I'm a Counsellor at George Brown College. I'd like to share with you some simple tools for shifting from stress to more peace. Different areas of our lives can contribute to stress. For example, studying, work, relationships, taking care of our health, different responsibilities we may have, and different challenging life situations can all contribute to stress. There are various simple practices that can help us reduce stress. In this webinar, we're going to be practising some tools that can help us improve sleep and reduce stress around tests or assignments.

First, let's take a moment to speak about stress.

Some levels of stress or stimulation, as we know, can be good for us. However, stress can easily accumulate, resulting in there being too much of it. If there is too much stress, we can experience feelings of overwhelm for example. Feelings of overwhelm can easily lead to feelings of anxiety. High stress can make it difficult to focus, for example to focus on what we're studying. Other signs of high stress can include our bodies feeling exhausted, and our motivation becoming weaker. Stress can also affect how we are showing up in our relationships with other people. When there's too much stress going on, we can sometimes say things or do things that we regret, for example. Ongoing high levels of stress can also be associated with various physical symptoms for some people, and that's unique for each individual. For example, skin problems often are associated with high stress, as well as digestive issues, fatigue, and poor sleep. Weaker immune system can be connected to high levels of stress. So we can see that it's really important for us to be continuously taking care of ourselves. I wanted to share some simple fun ways of taking care of ourselves that many of you probably already practice. Here is a slide on 50 ways to take a break.

I invite you to think about what works for you, what you enjoy.

Sometimes, this can be going for a walk outside, reading a book, or listening to music. It could be calling a friend, or viewing some art, dancing, petting a furry creature, tea break, or lots of other things. And there are some of them written out here for you in larger font if it was harder to see on the previous slide.

Today I wanted to speak with you about mindfulness.

Mindfulness is one of the ways for us to take care of ourselves and it can help reduce stress. Perhaps some of you are practising mindfulness already. For some of you, this may be completely new.

One of the ways to describe mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.

## Breathing Practice

Today, I wanted to share a breathing practice with you. Because breathing can really easily reflect our mood, how we're feeling, and it can also help us change our mood. We've all experienced this – sometimes, when we feel more stressed, more anxious, or when there are more worries present, the breathing is often experienced around the chest area. It is often more frequent and can be more shallow. Not much oxygen gets into our system when we're feeling worried or anxious.

And opposite, when we're feeling more relaxed, for example after going on a walk in nature, the breathing can settle and can become deeper and slower, with the belly and the diaphragm being more involved. With this deeper, more relaxed breathing, the nervous system can relax. There can be many benefits such reduced heart rate, reduced blood pressure, and stimulation to our immune system. And of course, feeling more relaxed. Now I'd like to share one breathing practice with you.

## A few words on Self-Care

Please participate as much or as little as you want. Different things work for different people at different times. This is only one example of a practice. And you can change things up. For example, if I'm inviting us to close the eyes, you can open the eyes at any time. You can stretch at any point. You can also shift attention to another part of the body that feels more comfortable. For example, you can shift attention towards the feet. And you can discontinue the meditation at any time.

## Attitude with which we are practicing: Kindness

One more piece is our attitude with which we are practising this breathing meditation or any mindfulness activity. An attitude of kindness is key to mindfulness. Kindness is a way with which we are present to our experience.

I invite you to think of a favourite pet. Some of you might be cat people. I have a picture of a cat here. Some of you may like other pets more. I invite you to bring to mind an image of a favourite pet.

Just tuning into a sense of care, perhaps, you have for this pet. Or for some of us, bringing to mind an image of a heart or maybe an image of sunshine could be an easier way to connect to this sense of care and kindness.

In this meditation, I invite us to bring a little bit of this sense of care and kindness towards our own experience. Just bringing this friend of kindness towards any thoughts that are here, any feelings that might be present, and any experiences of sensations in the body, just any experience you have, basically.

Seeing if you can bring in a bit of kindness with you as we come along for this journey.

## Breathing Meditation

I invite you to find a comfortable way to sit with your feet planted on the ground. Not crossing the feet, and allowing your hands to gently be resting on your lap, allowing your back to be upright and relaxed. And just noticing your feet on the ground.

If you want, you can also practice this meditation standing or lying down, whatever is more comfortable for you.

I invite you for a moment to notice your feet on the ground. And to notice any sensations here, maybe contact with the shoes or contact with the floor. The feet carry us around.

Perhaps extending a sense of gratitude towards the feet.

If you like trees, I invite you to imagine roots of a favourite tree growing from the soles of the feet, all the way down towards the nourishing ground. Being aware of the roots if you'd like, or aware of the feet and the support of the floor.

When feeling ready, extending a sense of kindness towards your back.

Noticing how your back is right now, and if there are any shifts that are needed for your back to feel more comfortable, for the breath to flow more easily.

And perhaps noting also the support of the chair or of what you're sitting on.

When feeling ready, if you'd like extending a kind welcome towards your face, noting your facial expression just as it is.

And extending the sense of kindness towards your whole body as you are sitting here.

I also invite you, if that feels comfortable, to place one hand around the heart area and the other hand around the belly area, or anywhere else on your body where that feels comfortable to you.

And see if you can feel the warmth of the hands, or just the contact of the hands. And perhaps, your own sense of goodwill and kindness coming from the centre of the hands towards you.

You can keep your hands here as a source of support for as long as you want. And at any point, you can also let go of the hands.

This contact with the hands can also help us connect with the breath. If you'd like, placing the hands somewhere on your body where you can feel your breath more comfortably. This could be around the belly area, or around the heart area or anywhere else.

And just for a moment, I invite us to tune into the slight movements of the hands.

The hands are moving out gently on the in-breath and moving in gently on the exhale.

Moving out gently on the in-breath. And moving in gently on the exhale.

Just see if you can be present here with the movements of your hands.

Noticing how the breath is coordinated with the movement of the hands. Just being here with the movement of the breath.

If there are lots of thoughts, that is normal and natural. The invitation is to just notice with kindness that your thoughts are here. And just simply let them be and see if you can return your attention back to the contact with the hands or to the sensations of the feet on the ground, support of the ground.

I invite us to take longer breaths, to nourish the body with longer breath. So here, taking a longer breath in through the nose, and a longer exhale through the mouth.

A longer breath in through the nose.

And an even longer exhale through the mouth.

Allowing the exhale to be longer than the inhale helps the body relax.  
And if you'd like to, counting may be helpful here. If you'd like, counting up to three or four on the in-breath,  
allowing a natural pause  
and allowing a natural exhale. Counting up to four or five on the exhale.  
Pausing.  
And taking a longer breath in, counting up to three or four.  
Pausing.  
And allowing an exhale with a count to four or five.  
And letting go of the counting, if you'd like, and just allowing the breath to return to a natural pace of breathing.  
Just being here aware of your breath and aware of the support of the floor, of what you're sitting on.  
And maybe, taking a moment to notice a sense of gratitude for this ability to breathe or for anything else.  
When feeling ready, allowing a stretch, finding a way to stretch. And if your eyes were closed, opening your eyes gently when you're ready.

## Checking-In

I invite you to notice how you are: what sensations do you notice in your body? Is there anything that is different from the time before we started this breathing practice? Is anything different? Maybe there is more of a sense of calm or ease. Maybe you notice more relaxation. Or maybe there is more tiredness you are noticing or anything else, like pain. Whatever your experience is, I invite you to bring a sense of kindness to your experience, just as it is.

If you enjoyed this meditation, if you felt a sense of calm or more ease for example, this meditation may be useful in various ways. For example, it may help with falling asleep. It could be useful as a pause before taking a test, as a pause before working on an assignment, or before joining a Zoom call.

There are many different breathing and meditation practices. Different meditation practices may be needed at different times, depending on how we are feeling and what we need at that time. Sometimes, this may not be a good fit at all. I invite you to notice what works for you and to look for what you like.

I'd like to share a couple more other practices that are simple to see if you may like them more. One of them is a meditation poem.

## Meditation Poem

Often students say that it is hard to focus on the breathing. There are a lot of thoughts present and there is a lot of restlessness that is felt. And that is completely normal and natural. A meditation poem could be useful. In a meditation poem, we link words of the poem to our breathing and this can help the mind focus. Here is one meditation poem by Thich Nhat Hanh. He is a famous meditation teacher who lives in France. The meditation is adapted a little bit. And I'm going to read it to you. Here it says,

I know I'm breathing in.  
I know I'm breathing out.  
I call my body and my mind.  
I smile.  
I dwell in the present moment.  
I know this is a precious moment.

You are invited to change the words and even invent your own poem. Here, I'm going to read these words to us. I invite you to connect your breath with the lines of the poem here on the screen.

On inhale, I invite you to say to yourself silently, I know I'm breathing in.  
And on the exhale, I invite you to say to yourself, I know I'm breathing out.  
On the in-breath: I calm my body and my mind.  
On the exhale, I smile. See if you can actually bring a gentle smile to your face if you want.  
On the in-breath, I dwell in the present moment.  
On the exhale, I know this is a precious moment.

And we can make this poem even simpler. On the right side of the slide, we have just short words:

In, Out, Calming, Smiling, Present Moment, Precious Moment.  
I invite you on the in-breath to say: In.  
On the exhale, saying to yourself: Out.  
On the in-breath: Calming.  
On the exhale: Smiling.  
Present moment on the in-breath.  
Precious moment on the exhale.

And noticing how you are feeling. Perhaps, noticing a sense of presence, maybe aliveness, maybe a sense of wholeness and completion that is right here when we pause. And that is always here with us. And when you are ready, I invite you to find a stretch. Sitting can often be difficult and not an easy way to meditate. Another equally valid way is to stretch or move. Stretching or moving can be a meditation also.

## Stretching

If it interests you, I invite you to notice your wrists. What kind of stretch is needed by your wrists? My wrists do so much typing. So just seeing what stretch feels good for your wrists. And you can invite your breath to be right here with your wrists, inviting a sense of kindness and care to be here also.

If you want, noticing how your shoulders are and what stretch feels good to your shoulders and to your back. What feels good to your spine? Inviting breath, inviting kindness right here towards your back. And you can pause this recording for a few moments if you'd like and even put on a favourite song. If you'd like, you can simply take five minutes to enjoy a movement, a stretch with a sense of kindness and care. That can also be meditation. Thank you for trying this with me.

## Other simple ways to bring Mindfulness into Daily life

I'd like to share some other ways to practice being, to practice mindfulness. Going for a walk can be a great opportunity to practice mindfulness. If you enjoy going for walks or for hikes, one way is to simply notice the different colours around you, to notice different sensations: maybe it's the feeling of the feet on the ground, maybe it's the smell of the air, maybe it's the feeling of the wind on your skin. Whenever you notice your attention is in lots of thoughts, see if you can just gently redirect attention to sensations and take the time to simply enjoy the walk.

Another way to practice is to bring a little bit of a pause and kindness to eating. We are eating anyways, so this can be a convenient way to practice. For example, we can practice mindful eating during breakfast, or any part of breakfast, even if it is drinking tea. In the mindful eating practice, we can pause, turning the phone off for example, so that we don't need to multitask and can simply enjoy the food or the drink. Maybe we can feel the taste of the food and enjoy and be nourished by what we are eating. Eating in this intentional way where we are present and enjoying can actually help digestion. And here is another way to practice mindfulness that I find to be fun. I like water, so for me washing the dishes slowly, where I am just noticing the sensations of water on my hands or noticing how the dishes feel can be another way for the nervous system to relax. Dancing and moving to favourite music that helps us feel good is another way for the nervous system to rebalance. When we move with awareness and kindness, it can be a mindfulness practice also. We all have our own ways. I invite you to listen to what works for you.

## Mindfulness is about awareness

Overall, I find that mindfulness can help us bring more awareness. When we pause and slow down, when we take a moment to just pause with kindness, this may help our nervous system to relax. When we are feeling more settled and more present, it can be easier for us to choose how we want to respond more wisely to a situation we are facing. For example, if we take a couple of moments to just breathe and pause, it may be easier for us to notice perhaps what to say to somebody or to ourselves in a situation, what to do or what not to do in a situation. Thank you for trying these mindfulness practices with me.

## Resources

If you like the meditation poems, there are more beautiful poems that you can find in this [link](#). There are poems for eating, for washing dishes, for walking, etc. You can find different recorded meditations on these two websites. And there are various mindfulness meditation apps. As I said earlier, different things work for different people. I invite you to be curious and kind and choose what may work for you. If you have questions or want more support, you are very welcome to contact counselling services.

This resource is here for you at the college. We have a great website that you're welcome to check out. You can actually book a time to meet with a counsellor if you'd like through this website. Or you can email [letstalk@georgebrown.ca](mailto:letstalk@georgebrown.ca). There is also a 24/7 phone number that is available for college students and it is a free and confidential access to support anytime that you need it.

Thanks very much for being here with me. I hope you take a sense of kindness and care with you wherever you are in your day, knowing that wherever you are, we can pause and connect with this friend of kindness. Thank you.