

TEN TIPS FOR BETTER CONCENTRATION

Concentration is one of the biggest challenges meditators face. In fact, it is usually the reason people claim they cannot meditate. Here are ten techniques that will build better concentration, give you more clarity on why you are challenged and invite you to be more compassionate during your distracted moments.

Qualities of Attention (Tool) – Mindfulness of the type of attention we are bringing to the moment during meditation increases our concentration because it explains why we are challenged to stay focused.

Thalamus Breaking Attention – The thalamus is the part of our brain that dictates whether we will entertain a stimulus or not, (aka gatekeeper). On average our thalamus breaks our attention four times per minute to scan our environment for threats. Therefore, if your attention is breaking in this way, you can consider that this is simply how your brain works and bring your attention back to your stimulus.

Rotation between Stimuli – Choosing one stimulus to focus on, such as the sound of a fan or a sensation in our leg, can be challenging. If this is the case, try rotating between two or three different stimuli, such as a sound, a sensation and your breath.

Ebb and Flow & Self-compassion – Experienced meditators know that our attention naturally ebbs and flows between staying focused and being distracted. Notice this phenomenon without judgment and give yourself compassion if you are distracted. For example, “It is understandable that I am having trouble focusing. It has been a busy day.”

Right Now It’s Like This – This is a phrase that has become popular among the mindfulness community. When we state this, we know that whatever is happening is temporary and later it might be different. State this phrase to accept the circumstances you are in, whether that is a loud truck rolling by, a pain in your side, or difficulty staying

focused. When you move into acceptance, you quickly ease into a comfortable meditation.

This Breath Is Enough – Sometimes we are challenged to concentrate during meditation because we do not believe what we are doing is enough. We think instead of just being we should do the dishes or pay the bills. But the reality is that this moment of simply being is enough. State, “This breath is enough.” “This sensation is enough.” “This sound is enough.” “This moment is enough.”

Practice of Noting (Tool) – This is a traditional mindfulness technique. Notice your thinking and then simply name the thinking, either “thinking”, “planning”, “rumination”, “worry”, “past”, “future” etc. This allows you to take a step back from your own thinking and not be controlled by it.

Relinquishing Point (Tool) – With practice, you will likely notice a moment in your meditation when your thinking gives up and is quiet. When this happens notice what is happening on a physical, emotional and cognitive level. Eventually, when you notice these indicators you will fall into a deeper, quieter meditation. They become comforting.

Form Vs Content (Tool) – This is a technique inspired by the mindfulness teachings about moving away from the story of our thoughts and moving towards the abstraction of our thinking. Essentially you imagine your thoughts as an abstract visual symbol, such as a wave or a sphere.

22-Minute Exercise (Tool) – This is a step-by-step exercise in identifying thinking, investigating thinking and naming thinking. You will become aware of the variety of forms of thinking we have, including narration, random unconscious verbal thinking, and visual engaged thinking.