

Here's how it works:

1. Take a deep breath.

Take a slow inhale, filling your lungs from bottom to top. Inhale into your lower belly and then fill upward through your mid-torso and chest.

This will help you take advantage of the well-documented connection between breath and mood. By slowing and deepening your breathing, **you can actually create feelings of relaxation and calm.**

2. Turn toward your body.

Open your attention to the sensations in your body. Let yourself notice whatever comes up: warmth, coolness, tingling, pressure, or the touch of clothing. There's no need to evaluate the sensations as "good" or "bad." Itching is simply itching. Coolness is simply coolness.

If you notice a complex array of sensations: perfect. If all you notice is the feeling of your butt on the chair: also perfect.

If you notice sensations that seem connected to stress or anxiety, those are especially good to pay attention to. Maybe it's a twisting in your gut or a tightness in your chest or warmth on your face. **If you can stay with these bodily sensations and watch them, rather than taking the bait of anxious thoughts, you can let tough emotions pass without taking too much heat.** It's like playing in the ocean: When a wave is coming, and you try to plant your feet and resist, you get knocked over. Then everyone points and laughs. But if you dive straight through the wave, it's no problem.

This step needn't take longer than one in-breath or out-breath. Stay with it longer if you like, but it can be that quick.

3. Rest your attention on your breath.

Pay attention to the sensation of air touching your nostrils as you breathe. With gentle curiosity, watch the flow of changing sensations at the nostrils. **These sensations anchor you in the present moment.**

In this step, there's no need to deepen or slow your breath at all; just let your body breathe however it wants to. And just like the previous step, this step can be as short as one in-breath or one out-breath. You might feel like staying with it longer, but that's up to you.

4. Carry on with your life!

The last step of the mindful pause is to simply **re-engage with the world, without hurry.**

Open your eyes if you closed them ... and carry on with your day. But see if you can maintain that calm feeling and groundedness you just created. Don't lunge for your phone or speed off to your next activity. **If you can, take a few seconds just sitting or standing there quietly, and then move at a more leisurely pace.**

Because mindful pauses are so quick and discreet, you can do them anywhere, anytime.

You can use the mindful pause at your desk, on public transit, in line at the grocery store, in a box, with a fox...

The hardest part isn't actually completing the mindful pause itself; it's remembering to do it in the first place. Try to remember mindful pauses by linking them to specific anxious moments that occur on a daily basis.

Do not fall into the trap of using the mindful pause as a way to resist your anxiety. You'd do the four steps then think to yourself, "What the heck? My anxiety is still here! The stupid thing didn't work."

But the trick is to accept that tough feelings, like anxiety, will come and go. When they're here, they're here, but that doesn't need to be a problem. By turning toward our emotions and watching them, even for 30 seconds, we can find real relief.

Taking mindful pauses can change your life!