

## Informal Practice (everyday mindfulness)

In addition to formal practice, it is very helpful to reinforce the new habit of mindful awareness with moments of informal practice whenever possible over the course of the day. As one teacher put it, we do not meditate to become good meditators, we meditate so that we will have moments of awareness in the rest of our lives. Having these moments of being fully present in our everyday lives is really the whole point of doing practice. One way to increase the likelihood of having these moments is to use everyday events as reminders to come back to the present, even if only for a moment or two. Remember, no matter what else is happening, you always have the sensation of the breath available as an anchor to the present moment. This may seem a little awkward at first, but with repetition there is less thinking (“Oh yeah, time to find the breath.”) and judgment (“This is silly”, or boring, too hard, a waste of time, etc.). Gradually the thinking and language fall away and it becomes truly habitual and natural to go straight to awareness of the breath, or other sensations. Some ideas to start with:

Come back to the breath for a moment every time you notice your pebble or sticker.

When the phone rings, bring your attention to where you are and take one breath before you move to answer it.

If you come to a red light while driving or walking, take the opportunity while you have a few seconds to yourself to come back to the breath.

When you reach for a door handle, pay attention to the sensations in the hand and arm as you open the door.

Whenever you transition from one activity to another, notice where the attention goes. Take a moment to be aware of where you are. You may even start by thinking “ending (this activity)” or “beginning (this activity)” to be aware of these transitions. When my family sits down for dinner, we all look at each other, smile, and say “Good evening” to each other as a way of marking the transition from “before dinner” to “dinner”, and bringing our attention fully to the table (thanks to Thich Nhat Hanh for this one). The non-meditators felt a bit silly for a short time about doing it, but everyone soon became very enthusiastic, because this simple “coming to the table” moment really changes the experience of sitting down to eat together.

When you first wake up in the morning, notice the sensations of getting out of bed. See if you can really notice your feet hitting the floor as a moment of transition from “sleeping” to “not sleeping” (or whatever words work best for you).

When you walk down the hall or down the street, just walk. Instead of daydreaming or thinking about what you will do when you arrive at your destination, really feel your steps for a little while.

If you have a watch with a timer or a phone app, set it to go off once on the hour. When it goes off, notice where the attention is at that moment. If you have the opportunity, stop what you are doing and take a few breaths. If not, just notice whether your experience of doing whatever you are doing changes after returning attention to the present moment even briefly.

You may discover your own mini-mindfulness cues in your daily routine. Mindfulness practice is simple, the hardest part is just remembering to do it.