



BB1

TBH BRAIN BUILDER 1 | JUST BREATHE

15 MINUTES

This Brain Builder will demonstrate how simple breathing exercises benefit our attention skills and emotional balance.

ALL TOGETHER Work as a whole group

BRAIN SKILLS WORKED Attention, Executive Control

YOU WILL NEED

- BB1 *Just Breathe* Guide Sheet
- Lowered lighting and reduce background noise to encourage engagement
- **Expert Opportunity:** Someone familiar with mindfulness or meditation who can lead the class



LEARN THE SCIENCE

This Brain Builder teaches us how just our breath can be a powerful tool to boost our cognitive health.

Breathing throughout the day is kind of a given, right? After all, we don't have to remember to breathe because our brains do it for us.

But thinking about our breathing and using our focus and attention to control it is good for our brain health.

Let me tell you why. Controlling your breathing is a big part of mindfulness – which is simply being more aware of yourself and the world around you.

Research shows there are so many benefits to being mindful, including increased cognitive function, better intellectual performance and increased focus and attention skills – all things that decrease with age.

Mindfulness and meditation have also been shown to improve brain vitality, emotional health – even our sleep patterns! Studies in 2011 and 2016 have shown that people who practice regular meditation or mindfulness experience improved blood flow to the brain. As one study author noted, “(T)he results of the present review provide preliminary support for the notion that MMPs (Mindfulness and meditation practice) could provide significant benefits on several measures of cognition.” (*Chiesa et al, 2011*)

Some research indicates that regular meditation may even reduce the risk of dementia and slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease.

We are all busy people with busy lives. But slowing down for even a few minutes every day to practice being mindful can improve your brain health for years to come. You can be mindful just about anywhere – sitting in the car for a few extra minutes after you get home, taking a walk on a nice day, even in the shower.



NOW DO IT

Now that we know how much mindfulness can benefit our brain health, we are going to try some simple breathing exercises that will help us focus and hold our sustained attention, again skills that naturally diminish as we get older. As an added benefit, these exercises will help us “de-stress” and can help us maintain better emotional balance.

I want you all to make sure you are sitting comfortably. I want you to feel as relaxed as possible. Are we ready? There is no right or wrong way here. Just follow along and concentrate. Ready?

1. Use the BB1 Just Breathe guide sheets to lead the group in breathing exercises.

How did you experience the breathing exercise? Was there anything you noticed that was new to you? Was there anything you found difficult?

2. After breathing exercises are complete, ask group members to discuss their experience of the breathing exercise.

Great work everyone. Take a deep breath and smile!



BRAIN BUILDER 1 TAKEAWAY

The exercises we did in this Brain Builder forced our brains to focus and hold sustained attention on our breathing, a core practice in mindfulness. Doing short, simple exercises like this each day, no matter where you are, benefits your brain and your whole body by relieving stress, improving brain vitality and emotional health and increasing cognitive function.