

## Practicing Mindful Awareness with Patients: 3-Minute Pauses

### Why 3-Minute Pauses?

The practice of mindful awareness allows us to enjoy a more complete experience of the present moment. The 3-minute pause is a centering exercise that clinicians can use during clinical encounters to introduce the practice of mindful awareness to patients.

Practicing with patients serves some important functions:

1. The clinician models the behavior change being asked of the patient, which can promote patient buy-in.
2. The patient is able to receive some coaching and guidance to facilitate more effective mindful awareness practice at home.
3. Shared practice grounds the clinician and patient in the room together. This can be especially helpful in the context of a challenging clinical encounter in which both the clinician and the patient could be served by more stable footing in the here and now.

### Tips for Doing Them With Your Patients

The following is an outline for use by clinicians during clinical encounters. The clinician should explain each step to the patient, while simultaneously modeling the practice. The practice can be amended as needed to suit the individual needs of patients and clinicians.

1. Invite the patient to sit comfortably, with both feet on the floor.
2. Have the patient close the eyes and turn the attention inward, or gaze softly at the floor.
3. Ask the patient to focus on the breath.
  - What is the quality of the inhale? Is it fast, slow, noisy, quiet, easy, or difficult?
  - What is the quality of the exhale? Is it fast, slow, noisy, quiet, easy, or difficult?
4. Instruct that if attention wanders, the patient should note the distraction, accept the distraction, and then return the focus to breathing.
5. Remind the patient to focus on the quality of the inhalation and the quality of the exhalation.
6. When three minutes have passed, invite the patient to open the eyes.
7. Now encourage reflection.
  - How did it feel to focus on breathing for three minutes?
  - What distractions came up? What was it like trying to accept the distractions and maintain focus on the breath?
  - Acknowledge that sustaining concentration in this way can be difficult, but that it becomes much easier with practice.



## Author(s)

This handout was adapted for the University of Wisconsin Integrative Health Program from the original written for the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) by Adrienne Hampton, MD, (2014, updated 2018). The handout was reviewed and edited by Veterans and VHA subject matter experts.