

Pebble Breathing

(Lying down) Place the pebble on your tummy . . . closing your eyes . . . and let's begin by taking a moment to feel really comfortable. Allowing your body to gently melt into the floor. When we are sitting or standing our muscles often work quite hard to support us - but now while you are lying on the floor, your muscles can let go of holding. Seeing if you can have a sense of releasing and softening . . .

Now shift your attention to your breathing. Notice when you are breathing in - and when you are breathing out . . .

You don't need to change your breathing - just keep breathing in your own normal way . . .

And notice when you are breathing in - and when you are breathing out . . .

Feeling the flow of air as it moves through your body . . .

Sensing the continuous rhythm of breathing in and breathing out . . .

Now take your attention to where the pebble is resting on your tummy. See if you can feel the movement of your breath and also the pebble. Notice how as you breathe in the pebble goes up a little bit. And how as you breathe out the pebble comes down. Rising and falling. Just like a wave.

And allowing this wave of your breath to be soft and gentle. You don't have to force your breathing, you don't have to change it in any way. Just feeling the rising and falling.

Noticing the pebble going up as you breathe in. And coming down as you breathe out. Very lightly, very softly.

And if from time to time your mind wanders and you find yourself thinking about something else – that's completely okay – it's just what our minds are used to doing. So when you notice you are thinking, very gently let go of the thought and bring your attention back to the breath.

Feeling the pebble going up as you breathe in. And coming down as you breathe out. Very lightly, very quietly.

And maybe you can have a sense of floating on the wave of your breath . . . Very softly rocking up and down . . . Rising and falling . . . Floating on the wave of your own breathing . . .

Now slowly bring this practice to an end and when you feel ready, gently open your eyes.

Strong Concentration

To help strengthen concentration, we can use a basic repetition in our mental gym. We begin by choosing to **focus** on a particular object such as the breath. At some point, you will probably become distracted (this is very normal). You simply **notice** the distraction, lightly **let go** of it, and intentionally **refocus** on the breath. Each time you do this, you are strengthening the neural circuitry which underlies attentional self-regulation.

Closing your eyes or resting your gaze lightly downwards and taking a moment to sense your posture. Feet flat on the floor, spine lightly elongated and head resting gently on top. Begin by intentionally choosing to focus on the breath. Place one of your hands on your stomach and see if you can feel the movement of the breath beneath your hand. Noticing when you are breathing in and when you are breathing out. Without forcing or straining and you don't need to change your breath in any way. Simply being aware of the in-breath and the out-breath. Now take your hand away from your stomach and place it somewhere comfortable. See if you can still focus on your breath. Giving your full attention to the sensation of breathing in and breathing out. At some point you may find your attention has wandered - perhaps you're thinking about something else. Simply notice the distraction, lightly let go of it, and intentionally refocus on your breath. Giving your full attention to the sensation of breathing in and breathing out. Slowly opening your eyes.

Circuit Breaker

In *Strong Concentration* we focused on the breath as a way of strengthening the 'muscle' of attention. We can also use the breath as a tool for self-calming. If you are feeling a bit edgy or worries are firing, try using the breath as a 'circuit breaker'. Simply take a moment to pause and pay attention to your breathing. Notice what happens.

Begin by closing your eyes or if this isn't comfortable, you can rest your gaze lightly downwards. Take a moment to sense your posture. Place your feet flat on the floor, allow your spine to be lightly elongated and your head resting gently on top - a bit like a balloon. Quietly shift your attention to your breathing. See if you can become aware of the sensations of the breath in the body. This is not about looking at the breath from the outside in, it's not about visualizing or imagining the breath - but feeling the different sensations as you breathe in and as you breathe out. Focus your attention in the area of your stomach and perhaps you can notice a subtle sense of swelling on the in-breath and subsiding on the out-breath. A bit like a wave. And allowing this wave of your breath to be easy and natural. If your mind wanders and you find yourself thinking about something else - lightly let go of the thought and bring your attention back to your breath. Back to the feeling of the breath gently flowing in and flowing out. And as you continue to focus on the breath, see if you can have a sense of softening into it. Allowing yourself to rest for a few moments in the natural rhythm of your own breathing. Resting and breathing. Slowly bringing this practice to a close and opening your eyes.