

Along with formal mindfulness practices that may run for between 5 and 45 minutes, there are short, informal, practice techniques that can be brought into the day to effect useful shifts in the quality of our focus, emotional well-being, and sense of connection to others. In this month's column we'll look at a popular practice technique, known as STOP. I'll also share a variation, one especially helpful as you first begin to practice it.

STOPPING THE MENTAL FREIGHT TRAIN

The acronym STOP stands for:

Stop (or sit, stand, slow down),

Take a breath (aware of the sensations of breathing)

Observe (something taking place in the present moment), and

Proceed

Let's give it a try:

- Begin with stop, or *intentionally* pausing, whether you are sitting, standing, walking, or lying down.
- Now, take a breath, aware of the breath as it moves through the body. If you'd like to feel a little more relaxed, slow down the breath.
- Observe the moment as it is. For example, you might continue to observe the sensations of breathing or notice what you are thinking, feel the temperature of the air, listen for sounds, or look around and see what's taking place in your environment. Keep it simple.
- After a few moments, proceed.

STOP can take as little as 5 or 10 seconds to practice. It is both a short mindfulness practice and a method for slowing things down . . . and calming down. You can practice it just about any time. The following links offer you short discussion of the practice by law professor and mindfulness teacher, [Rhonda Magee](#) and a short video that does a nice job explaining the STOP exercise to [children](#).

I find that because STOP can be practiced within such a short time window, the mental-moment can pass a bit too quickly and the benefits to mind and body and decision-making can be less than fully realized.

The following tweak hones in on the Stop portion to help ensure that it is not given short shrift.

COUNT TO 10

The instruction involves counting to 10 after coming to a Stop. Often, due to feelings of urgency, restlessness, anxiety, or just as a byproduct of our continuously spinning internal hamster-wheel, we may not come to as full a Stop as we might and we risk rushing through the rest of the instruction.

A good time to practice STOP is when walking from one place to the next — to a meeting, the restroom, to your home at the end of a long day, or perhaps to your child's room to read a bedtime story.

Somewhere on the way to your destination, come to a complete stop. *Then, slowly count to 10.* It's like pressing a reset button. After giving your mind and body a little more time to settle, then take an intentional breath, aware of the breath, observe what is arising, and then proceed on to your destination.

As you experiment with STOP, see what might begin to shift. You can even practice in your car while driving. Should you forget or get lost in thought, you might see a . . . sign.



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