From: five good minutes in the evening: 100 mindful practices to help you unwind from the day & make the most of your night. (Brantley & Millstine, 2006)

It All Begins with Being Present

Life is happening in this moment, and the richness of life becomes available only when you are present for it. …Anything you do becomes more rich and potent when you take a minute or so to establish your attention and awareness in the present moment before doing anything else.

Being present includes feeling a sense of peace and ease. We've included practices to help you relax, release stress and tension, and even laugh. You may wish to find one of these and spend your five good minutes relaxing and releasing tension. It can be a good use of your time!

Being present requires that you make the effort to be here, in the present moment, by paying attention. Being present includes being patient when your attention wanders away. This happens to everyone. Kindness and patience with yourself will support you as you bring your attention back, time and again.

Being present happens more easily when you let go of any thoughts about the next anything and connect instead with this breath in this moment. You may not be able to be present for five breaths or ten sounds, but you can be present for this breath or this sound.

Your Keys to Being Present

It takes some skill and practice to be truly present. …we refer to this way of being present as "being mindful," and by that we mean paying attention on purpose in a friendly and nonjudging way that allows experience to come to you.

When you pay attention mindfully, you don't seek to change, add, or subtract anything from what you are experiencing. It is actually a practice just to be mindful. You practice paying attention-as if it really mattered-to your experience in this moment, as it unfolds, and as you allow yourself to receive whatever arises.

Mindful Breathing

Below are easy-to-follow instructions for practicing mindful breathing. In essence, mindful breathing is simply directing your attention entirely to a focus on your breath-observing it as it occurs without attempting to control it. Here are some simple instructions for mindful breathing:

1. Make yourself comfortable. You can do mindful breathing in any posture: sitting, lying down, standing, or even walking.
2. To reduce distractions, close your eyes or focus softly on a spot on the ground a few feet ahead of you.
3. For the time of this practice, let go of all agendas. You don't have to become anyone or anything else or make anything special happen. You already have what it takes to be mindful. Just relax.
4. Gently bring your attention to your body, and then to the sensations of your breath moving in your body. Rest your attention at the spot where it is easiest for you to actually feel your breath moving in and out. The chest or abdomen rising and falling, or the tip of the nose are common points of focus.
5. Let the breath sensations come to you. You need not control your breath in any way. Let it flow naturally as you bring a kind, allowing attention to the sensations of inhaling, pausing, exhaling, and so on, breath after breath.
6. When your attention wanders away from your breath, you haven't made a mistake or done anything wrong. Simply notice this movement of attention, understanding it as a habit of your mind, and kindly return your attention to the breath sensations happening in the moment. Your mind will likely move away from your breath countless times. Each time, just notice where it went and practice kindness and patience with yourself as you return your attention to the breath sensations happening in the moment.
7. Don't struggle with being present for many or even a few breaths, but instead focus on connecting with this breath, this inhalation, this exhalation. Even if you can't focus on two consecutive breaths, you can focus on this breath. To be present for this breath is good enough.
8. Move your attention closer, noticing the quality of each new breath as accurately and continuously as you can. Try to stay present for the entire cycle of the breath: in, pause, out, pause.
9. End your breath meditation by shifting your focus off of your breath sensations, opening your eyes, and moving gently.