

## Finding an Anchor

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It's hard for people to focus when they try to practice [mindfulness](#). I know I get lost in my memories, start thinking of things that will happen tomorrow or well even in the next 15 minutes, and I certainly struggle with focusing on just being in the now. With practicing mindfulness its best to have something to hold you in place, something to keep your mind from wandering around because it takes less than a second to start disconnecting and to begin solving problems, mulling over issues, or to start rehearsing what you'll say next.



### Barriers to Focus

Before we examine more about that something to hold us in place, lets think about why it is that we can't focus. Of course, things we think about are usually useful. They are solutions, valuable thoughts, and creative inspirations but sometimes they can lean towards the opposite spectrum. For example, they can be negative, limiting, and depleting. When thoughts do follow a negative path, they increase our stress and anxiety levels and foster negative interactions with others. We've previously discussed negativity bias in the Mindfulness Series: [Understanding our Connection to Others](#) article. It's great that our ancestors thought that all sticks were snakes when they foraged or hunted but for us, we've got to strive to see the positive, the glass half full, and to be a positive beam in the world. To help us in this, we must find an anchor.

**Anchor** (pronounced 'an-kar): 1. a device usually of metal attached to a ship or boat by a cable and cast overboard to hold it in a particular place by means of a fluke that digs into the bottom 2. Something that serves to hold an object firmly. Merriam-Webster

There are tons of different anchors available to you, but they all based on at least one of your five senses: sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch.

### Breath as an anchor

One of the first thought of and, of course, biggest components of mindfulness is breathing. Yes, just breathe. Breath is neutral. It is not a strong emotion and not something that we hate or even really love. It is just there, continually, all day, every day. We breathe in, breathe out, and it can be found any time we remember it. When starting out, people are asked to "find their breath" and focus their attention on it by placing a hand on where it is felt most. Your breath is the easiest anchor; you just need to remember you are breathing. Simply repeating to yourself "breathe in and breathe out," in a slow, calm voice is the best way to refocus your attention.

## Five Senses

Breath as an anchor doesn't work for everyone. Some people struggle breathing or may have had some sort of trauma related to it. When that's the case, you have to find something else on which to focus. Pick just one of your five senses to focus on and pick one thing that helps you to focus and keeps your mind from spinning and thinking of those 500 other things that you typically do.

Each of the following could be great anchors for any of the five senses and there are tons more that might be perfect for you. As with any anchor, be careful with the things you choose. Don't choose the ones that can automatically make you start thinking of other things. Think about trying one of these:

Your body as you breathe	A lava lamp	A birds' song
A candle flame	Mindful bike riding	A radiator hum
The floor	Rhythmically shifting body weight	A repetitive drumbeat
Something burning	Mindful walking or running	A clock ticking
A piece of art	Mindful posture	Scented flowers
Your palm	Tai chi	The sound or feel of a heartbeat
Water flowing	Yoga	An overhead fan
Sand in an hourglass	Mindful weight training	Wind blowing in the trees
Mindful swimming	Incense or essential oils	Weighted blanket
Intuitive movements	Sounds of nature	Pulling a shawl or blanket tight
Mindful eating	Weighted blanket	Rhythmically petting a pet
Mindful drinking	Simple Music	A simple chant or repeated word

On different days and under different circumstances, you may prefer one anchor over another. This could change halfway through trying to practice mindfulness. It doesn't matter what anchor you choose just use it to keep your mind in a present place and repeatedly draw your attention back as you try and focus to be mindful.