

A FREE GUIDE

When You Can't Stop Thinking

A gentle 7-day guide to a quieter mind

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BEFORE YOU START

Hello, and welcome

If your mind won't stop, you're in good company. In over twenty years of teaching, one of the questions I hear most is some version of this: *how do I get my mind to be quiet?*

Here's the honest answer I've come to. You can't force your mind to be quiet. But it often quietens all by itself when you stop fighting it.

This little guide gives you seven days to try that out for yourself. Each day has one idea and one short practice. Most take five to ten minutes. You don't need any experience, special equipment or a quiet house.

Shamash

- **One day at a time.** If you miss a day, just pick up where you left off.
- **A busy mind isn't a failed practice.** It's the very thing you're practising with.
- **Be curious.** Notice what helps you, and do more of that.

Day 1 · Stop the fight 3

Day 2 · Treat your mind like a friend 4

Day 3 · Name it, kindly 5

Day 4 · Write it out 6

Day 5 · Drop the rope 7

Day 6 · Come back to your body 8

Day 7 · Let rest be enough 9

DAY 1

Stop the fight

I found out how to quieten my mind almost by accident.

I'd had two weeks of low energy. I was tired, flat and couldn't push myself to work. So I gave up trying. I lay in bed listening to meditations and talks on YouTube, a bit like a retreat under the duvet.

And then something I wasn't expecting happened. During one meditation, my mind went completely silent. Not because I made it. Because, for once, I'd stopped trying to.

Your mind is a bit like a team of overworked staff. The more you micromanage them, the more agitated they get and the less they get done. Step back, let them get on with it, and things settle.

Trying hard to stop thinking is just more thinking. So today, put the effort down.

Today's practice: five minutes off duty

5 MINUTES

1. Sit or lie down, whatever's comfortable.
2. Set a timer for five minutes.
3. Let your mind do whatever it wants. Think, plan, worry, daydream. You're not trying to stop any of it.
4. Each time you notice yourself pushing a thought away, smile, and let go of the pushing.

> *Notice: what happened when you stopped trying to control your mind? It may have got busier at first. That's normal. Just notice.*

DAY 2

Treat your mind like a friend

When a good friend is talking, you don't tell them to shut up. You listen. You're interested. And when they've said what they need to say, they often go quiet by themselves.

Your mind has been working hard for you all day, every day. It's trying to help, even when it's going round in circles. What would happen if you treated it with a bit of warmth instead of irritation?

Today's practice: five gentle steps

10 MINUTES

1. **Get really comfortable.** If you drift off to sleep, that's fine. Your mind clearly needs the rest.
2. **Listen to your mind like a friend.** Be interested in what it's saying, without arguing back.
3. **Be content with it as it is.** Busy, restless, tired. Let it be exactly like this for now.
4. **Watch your thoughts** the way you'd watch clouds, or people walking by. You'll get caught up in some of them. That's fine too.
5. **Notice any gaps** between thoughts. Welcome them, without trying to make them longer.

When I first tried this, my mind wandered even more than usual. But with patience, it settled, and the quiet that came was a natural one, not a forced one.

> *Notice: did you spot any gaps between your thoughts, even tiny ones?*

DAY 3

Name it, kindly

Some thoughts feel like the truth. *I'm going to mess this up. They're annoyed with me. I'll never sort this out.* When you're inside a thought like that, it's hard to see anything else.

A simple way out is to name it. Quietly say to yourself, "Ah, there's the job worry again." Naming a thought loosens its grip. You're no longer inside it. You're looking at it.

You may find the same few stories come round again and again. You can give them names too: the "not good enough" story, the "what if" story, the "everything's going wrong" story. Say it with a little humour if you can. You're not trying to argue with the story. You're just recognising an old friend.

Today's practice: noting

5 TO 10 MINUTES

1. Sit comfortably and rest your attention on your breath, or on the sounds around you.
2. When a thought pulls you away, silently name what kind it is: *planning, worrying, remembering, judging.*
3. Use a soft, friendly inner voice, as if you were noting the weather.
4. Then gently come back to the breath or the sounds.

> *Notice: which type of thought came up most? Did naming it change how sticky it felt?*

DAY 4

Write it out

Sometimes your head is so full that sitting quietly with it feels impossible. When that happens to me, I pick up a pen.

Here's how I picture it. A mind that can't stop thinking is like a stale lake, with the same thoughts circling round and round. Writing lets the water flow out, like a river. It freshens things up.

Today's practice: stream of consciousness writing

5 TO 10 MINUTES

1. **Grab paper you can tear out.** Knowing you can bin it afterwards lets you write honestly.
2. **Set a timer** for five to ten minutes.
3. **Write everything that comes into your head.** Don't edit, don't tidy, don't worry about spelling.
4. **Keep going when it slows down.** You'll start running out of things to say. That's your mind settling.
5. **If you don't know what to write, write that.** "I don't know what to write." Then carry on.

You may get quite reflective as you write. A lot of overthinking comes from being stuck with a problem. Writing it out can ease that, and sometimes you see the problem differently and it doesn't feel like such a big deal any more.

> *Notice: how did your mind feel at the end, compared with the start?*

DAY 5

Drop the rope

Imagine you're in a tug of war with a monster. The monster is a thought you can't shake: a conversation you keep replaying, a worry about tomorrow, something someone said. The harder you pull, the harder it pulls back.

You can't win by pulling harder. But you can drop the rope.

Dropping the rope doesn't mean the monster disappears. It may still be standing there, pulling faces. But you're no longer stuck in the struggle, and your hands are free for something that matters to you.

This idea comes from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), which I've taught alongside mindfulness for many years. It's one of the most freeing things I know.

Today's practice: let go, then take one step

5 MINUTES

1. Pick one thought that keeps pulling at you.
2. Say it to yourself in this form: "I'm having the thought that..."
3. Notice where you feel it in your body. Breathe gently around that place.
4. Say to yourself, "It's okay for this thought to be here."
5. Ask: "What small thing matters to me right now?" Then do it. Make the tea. Send the kind message. Step outside.

> *Notice: what did you do with your free hands?*

DAY 6

Come back to your body

When your head is spinning, your body is always here, right now. It's a place your mind can rest.

Not long ago I was waiting to give a talk in Washington DC. I was about to share a personal story I'd never told in public, and my heart was racing. So I did some box breathing in my seat. A count of four felt too long, so I made it three: in for three, hold for three, out for three, hold for three. After a few rounds, I felt grounded again.

The numbers are there to help you, not the other way round. And if counting gets in the way, you can leave it out altogether.

Today's practice: three ways home

2 TO 3 MINUTES, AS OFTEN AS YOU LIKE

1. **A longer out-breath.** Breathe in for three, and out for four or five. Keep it gentle.
2. **Small box breathing.** In for three, hold for three, out for three, hold for three.
3. **No counting at all.** Feel your feet on the floor. Feel your breath moving in your belly. Stay with that.

If you feel dizzy or uncomfortable, stop and breathe normally.

> *Notice: which of the three felt most natural for you? That's the one to keep.*

DAY 7

Let rest be enough

For many of us, the mind is busiest at 2am. You lie there, and the more you need to sleep, the louder your thoughts get.

The same rule applies at night: don't fight to fall asleep. That's just more effort. Make rest itself the goal instead. Even if sleep hasn't arrived, resting with a kind attitude is deeply restorative.

Tonight's practice: resting in bed

AS LONG AS YOU LIKE

1. Let your body be heavy and comfortable. Let the bed hold you.
2. Tell yourself, "Right now, resting is enough."
3. Move your attention slowly through your body, from your toes up to your head, simply feeling each part.
4. When your mind wanders, let it. Treat it kindly, like you did on Day 2.
5. If you fall asleep, wonderful. If you don't, you're still resting.

And looking beyond tonight: a quieter mind isn't something you achieve once. It grows with gentle, regular practice. A few minutes a day, done kindly, will take you further than an hour done once in a while.

> *Notice: looking back over the week, which day helped you most?*

WHERE NEXT

Keep going, gently

Well done for getting this far. Whatever happened this week, you've spent seven days being kinder to your own mind. That matters.

Pick the one practice that helped you most and keep it going. Even two minutes a day is enough to start with.

Practise with me every morning

If you'd like company, I guide a live meditation every weekday morning at 7:30 UK time in the Daily Mindfulness Club. You can join live, or listen to the recording whenever suits you. Practising with other people, at the same time each day, can make it much easier to keep going.

Try the Club free for 7 days

Card needed, cancel any time before the week ends.

More to read

- How to stop thinking so much
- Stop fighting your emotions: drop the rope
- Box breathing vs 4-7-8 breathing

This guide is for general wellbeing, not a substitute for professional help. If your thoughts feel overwhelming, or you're finding it hard to cope, please talk to your GP or a mental health professional.

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