

**Obsessions** - repetitive, intrusive thoughts, and **compulsions** - ritualistic behaviors that feel out of control, both develop over the time. They usually start as a harmless thought or behavior that soothes or reduces anxiety. Problems arise when these patterns become unproductive, time-consuming, and limit life satisfaction. A common example is worrying about leaving an appliance on, or candle burning before leaving the house. This obsession had a beginning, the first time you had the thought, and a middle, where the thought becomes a habit, possibly developing into a compulsion - the behavior of repeatedly checking if the stove is turned off. Like all habits, these behaviors can have an end. You may be ready to change the behavior when the cost of the behavior (i.e. not being able to get out the door in time for work), outweighs the benefit (short-lived relief from anxiety.) When you feel like you have reached this point, you may want to consult with a mental health professional who can help you identify strategies to change your thoughts and behaviors. **Try this mindfulness practice to help begin to bring compulsions and obsessions to the end phase:**

**Reset the nervous system** - Taking five deep, even, breaths, focusing on the exhale will help calm your mind and body, lower your blood pressure, decrease anxiety and help you think more clearly.

**Recognize the pattern** - The first step in making any change is to recognize the problem behavior. Mindfulness can help you look at behaviors that up until now have been too scary or painful to face.

**Befriend the pattern** - Trying to push intrusive thoughts or behaviors away often backfires. Befriending the behavior takes away the associated fear and shame. Be gentle with yourself. Remember that these problematic thoughts and behaviors were once helpful to you. Mindfulness helps you build this gentle relationship with yourself.

**Refute the logic** - Taking time to rest your mind in the present moment, without planning or worrying helps bring the logical frontal lobe region of the brain back on line. This can help boost cognitive abilities. When you are in a calm, peaceful frame of mind, it is easier for you to ask yourself, "where is the evidence that counting to one hundred before I leave my house will keep me safe?"

**Break it down** - Once patterns are gently acknowledged, you can decide which pattern to tackle first. If you have a ritual that involved seven steps before sitting down to do some paperwork, and this ritual is causing missed deadlines, can you cut out one step? Which step would be easiest?

**Trust in this process of change** - It probably took a while for you to develop your obsessions and compulsions. It may take a while for you to undo them. But you can trust in the fact the mindfulness meditation has proven effects on the structure of the brain and by practicing mindfulness you are strengthening areas of the brain that will help you change habits.

For more information on starting a mindfulness practice, visit [mindfulhub.com](http://mindfulhub.com)

***We wish you twenty minutes of mindfulness every day!***

