

THE MAGIC OF THE HALF-SMILE

Accept reality with your body. Relax (by letting go or by just tensing and then letting go) your face, neck, and shoulder muscles and half-smile with your lips. A tense smile is a grin (and might tell the brain you are hiding or masking something). A half-smile is slightly upturned lips with a relaxed face. Our facial muscles communicate to the emotional part of the brain and vice versa. Emotions have a give-and-take relationship with facial muscles. A change in your facial expression generates emotional change, as a smile is experienced as a feeling.

Like the Mona Lisa's barely-there smile, the half-smile is a soft, almost imperceptible smile. The half-smile starts with relaxed lips which turn slightly upward and a loose jaw and the eyes are soft and relaxed. Then half-smile spreads to the whole face as your scalp and neck relax and your shoulders drop.

HALF-SMILE WHEN YOU FIRST WAKE IN THE MORNING

Hang a branch, any other sign, or even the word 'smile' on the ceiling or wall so that you see it right away when you open your eyes. This sign will serve as a reminder. Use the seconds before you get out of bed to take hold of your breath. Inhale and exhale three breaths gently while maintaining a half-smile. Follow your breaths.

HALF-SMILE DURING YOUR FREE MOMENTS

Anywhere you find yourself sitting or standing, half smile. Look at a leaf, a painting on a wall, or anything that is relatively still, and smile. Inhale and exhale quietly three times

HALF-SMILE WHILE LISTENING TO MUSIC

Listen to a piece of music for 2 or 3 minutes. Pay attention to the words, music, rhythm and sentiments of the music you are listening to (not your daydreams of other times). Half smile while watching your inhalations and exhalations.

HALF-SMILE WHEN IRRITATED

When you realise 'I'm irritated,' half smile at once. Inhale and exhale quietly, maintaining a half-smile for three breaths.

HALF-SMILE IN A LYING-DOWN POSITION

Lie on your back on a flat surface without the support of a mattress or pillow. Keep your two arms loosely by your sides and keep your two legs slightly apart, stretched out before you. Maintain a half-smile. Breathe in and out gently, keeping your attention focused on your breath. Let go of every muscle in your body. Relax each muscle as though it were sinking down through the floor, or as though it were as soft and yielding as a piece of silk hanging in the breeze to dry. Let go entirely, keeping your attention only on your breath and half-smile. Think of yourself as a cat, completely relaxed before a warm fire, whose muscles yield without resistance to anyone's touch. Continue for 15 breaths.

HALF-SMILE IN A SITTING POSITION

Sit on the floor with your back straight, or on a chair with your two feet touching the floor. Half-smile. Inhale and exhale while maintaining the half-smile. Let go.

HALF-SMILE WHILE CONTEMPLATING THE PERSON YOU DESPISE THE MOST

Sit quietly. Breathe and smile a half-smile. Imagine the image of the person who has caused you the most suffering. Regard the features you hate or despise the most or find the most repulsive. Try to examine what makes this person happy and what causes suffering in his or her daily life. Imagine the person's perceptions; try to see what patterns of thought and reason this person follows. Examine what motivates this person's hopes and actions. Finally, consider the person's consciousness. See whether the person's views and insights are open and free or not, and whether or not the person has been influenced by any prejudices, narrow-mindedness, hatred, or anger. See whether or not the person is master of himself or herself. Continue until you feel compassion rise in your heart like a well filling with fresh water, and your anger and resentment disappear. Practice this exercise many times on the same person.

Adapted from *The Miracle of Mindfulness: A Manual of Meditation* 1976, pp. 77-81, 93, by Thich Nhat Hanh, Boston, Beacon Press, Copyright 1976. Reproduced in *Skills Training Manual for Treating Borderline Personality Disorder* by Marsha Linehan (1993, Guilford Press). With thanks to Brent Menninger.