

Step 8 Guidance: Re-train your brain to get sober

Today is about starting to retrain the unconscious part of your brain. It's about moving away from some of that unconscious programming and letting go of unhelpful thoughts and behaviours. It's also about developing a more consciously aware approach to your life, and in particular, to your decisions and behaviours around alcohol.

Every single one of us has all the resources within us to live the life we want. They might have hidden themselves for a while, but they are there. Your next step is to build confidence in accessing some of those resources.

One of things that needs to happen for you to become effortlessly sober is for you to let go of unhelpful thoughts and patterns of behaviour and then to replace them with new, healthier thoughts and behaviours.

Step 8 is a really simple one. You have three audio recordings to listen to. Each audio is going to guide you through sitting still and breathing for 10 minutes or so.

This activity is about two things:

1. practising letting go of thoughts
2. helping to develop a healthier relationship with yourself.

Letting go of thoughts

The more you do this type of activity, the easier you'll find it to let go of unhelpful behaviours and thoughts in your daily life.

Learning to let go of thoughts and focusing all of your attention on your breathing is important training for your brain. It helps to re-wire neural connections and pathways and also helps you to take more control when you're making decisions around alcohol.

When you do this activity, you're firing up mind muscles that have long been dormant. As these muscles wake up, they give you more conscious control over the choices you make and actions you take in everyday life. This, in turn, makes it much easier for you to change old, unhelpful habits and create new sober ones.

Building a healthy relationship with yourself

Building a healthy relationship with yourself helps you to get sober and stay sober. For many of us, an unhealthy relationship with alcohol has grown from some kind of unhealthy relationship with ourselves. It is important for your new sober lifestyle that you can learn to build a stronger and healthier relationship with yourself.

These short audios start the ball rolling by gently helping you to accept and love yourself more.

They do this by simply allowing you to spend time on your own, with yourself while focusing on nothing but your breathing and your being.

About Audios 1, 2 & 3

It sounds really simple, but it can be less-than-easy for some people (like me!) to sit still and just be. If you're one of those people and you don't like the thought of sitting still and listening to an audio, don't worry - it's likely to have even more impact on you if you initially feel resistant to it.

Remember that, in changing your programming and re-wiring your brain, there needs to be some element of doing things differently. Stick with it and keep practising, especially the things that take you outside of your comfort zone or seem alien to you, and you will reap the rewards.

Before you listen to each audio, make sure you have 20 minutes of uninterrupted time and space. Make sure you won't be interrupted and have all gadgets turned off or on silent.

It's also important, when you're listening to the audios in the programme, that you're sitting in an upright and focused position. Although a bonus effect of the audios is that they help to relax you, it's helpful to maintain a degree of focus. So, ideally you want to be sitting either on the floor, with your back against a wall, or on a chair with a decent back support. Aim to keep your chin up while you listen to the audios too – the quality of your breathing is better when the air has a clear passageway into your body. If your chin ends up falling downwards towards your chest, your airways close more. So, you want to be in a relaxed but focused position that you can comfortably maintain for 20 minutes.

Step 8 offers you three audios that are very similar. Audio 1 is a gentle introduction and gives you lots of guidance. Audio 2 gives less of an introduction (less of me talking) and gives slightly longer pauses for you to spend longer focusing on your breathing and to practise letting your thoughts go.

Audio 3 is very similar to Audio 1 & 2 and you might notice some repetition. This is intentional and important. Conscious repetition is needed to change the neural pathways in your brain so that these changes become unconscious and managing your thoughts and behaviours in the way that you want becomes second nature to you.

For example, I used to be plagued with thoughts that led to serious and lengthy anxiety attacks that were quite debilitating. If I had an anxiety attack on a train for instance, the next time I needed to travel on a train, I would worry that I would have another anxiety attack. My thoughts would circle around how awful it would be to experience that anxiety again. The more I thought about an anxiety attack, the more likely it was that I would have one – and I usually did. I was literally talking myself into a full-blown anxiety attack even though that was the very thing I wanted to avoid.

Because I have repeatedly practised the *Retrain your Brain* audios, I've got used to being able to recognise any thoughts for what they are – just thoughts that can't hurt me. I don't focus on them, I simply let them drift away and they don't plague me anymore. Anxiety attacks hardly ever happen now and this, in turn, has taken away one of my "triggers" to drink. In the past, I would have reached for a drink to cure my anxiety and now I don't have to do that as I can just let go of any unhelpful thoughts. Anxiety either doesn't come or is much reduced and manageable.

You might not have any problem with anxiety, but the point here is that the repetition of this exercise helps you gain conscious control over any unhelpful thinking and behaviours, whether it be around anxiety, drinking or anything else.

This does take practice, but not a lot. Doing just one of the Retraining your Brain Audios every couple of days is enough. And a much healthier habit to get into than the minutes, hours or days you might have been spending on the drinking and recovering cycle.