Research has demonstrated that people who cannot make room for their distressing feelings have a very hard time with self-control.

This exercise will help you to find out whether you can use acceptance to increase your ability to sit with your uncomfortable emotions. You are going to hold your breath; as you hold it, follow the instructions listed below. Read them several times until you are confident you will be able to remember to do them, even when painful feelings start up for you. Do not start yet. Start when you see the word “start.” Just read over the following list:

- When you do the exercise and the urge to breathe becomes stronger, do the following: Notice exactly where the urge to breathe begins and ends in your body. Locate exactly where you feel the urge to breathe.
- See if you can allow that feeling to be precisely there and, at the same time, keep on holding your breath. Turn your willingness dial all the way up! Just feel the feeling and do not breathe...think of this a special opportunity to feel something you rarely feel.
- Notice any thoughts that come up, and gently thank your mind for the thought, without being controlled by that thought. Watch out for sneaky thoughts that can quickly lead to breathing before you decide to breathe. After all, who is in charge of your life? You or your word machine?
- Notice other emotions that may emerge other than the urge to breathe. See if you can make room for those emotions, as well.
- Survey your entire body and notice that, in addition to the urge to breathe, your body contains other sensations and continues to function.
- Stay with the commitment to hold your breath as long as you can. As the urge to breathe becomes stronger, imagine that you are continuously and deliberately creating that urge. Close your eyes and see if you can replicate this urge in your imagination, divorced from your body. With every pang in your chest, every worry you have about passing out, every instinct to breathe, shift if from something unwelcome that is being visited upon you to something you are creating deliberately, just for the sake of feeling what that feels like. This new urge is formally the same, but it is of your creation. Do you need to be threatened by your own creation?
- Before beginning to hold your breath, list one or two other actions you might do during this exercise that might help you to be aware of all of your feelings, thoughts, sensations and urges while you are holding fast to the goal of holding your breath. Write down only acceptance strategies, not experiential control or suppression strategies.

Read the bulleted list several times, until you feel you completely understand the instructions. You can glance at the list and remind yourself of things to do while really feeling what it feels like to want to breathe while not breathing.

You are ready to see if it is possible to control better your behavior (holding your breath) by learning to accept and make room for your thoughts and feelings.
Now, start:

Take a deep breath and hold it as long as you can. When you are finished, write down how long you held it: ________ seconds.

Describe your experience during this exercise.

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

Did the aversion of not breathing tend to come and go? When did it go up or down?

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

How did your mind try to persuade you to breathe before you really had to?

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

What was the sneakiest thing your mind did?

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________________________________________

Do you see any possible implications this simple exercise might have for how your life has been going, especially in the area you have been struggling with? If so, what do you see?

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