

HOW TO MEDITATE

1. Find a Quiet Place

Find a place where it is quiet and peaceful. In order to fully eliminate distractions, it can help to put your phone into airplane mode so you don't feel attached to it.

2. Warm-up your body with a light stretch

A light stretch will help to improve circulation, remove any inertia or restlessness, and will make your body feel lighter.

3. Sit Comfortably

Chairs and pillows are ok as long as you don't recline too much. The mind and body are connected, moving the body tends to keep the mind moving as well. If you sit still, you're halfway to a quiet mind.

4. Establish a calm breathing pattern

Allow your breath to get lighter and smoother. As your breath quiets down, begin to pay attention to the space between your breaths.

5. Practice Mindfulness

Once you are in a meditative state where the body is ready and calm, it is now time to focus on a routine of Mindfulness. This involves 4 areas:

Awareness

Acceptance

Appreciation

Affirmation

STAGE 1 – AWARENESS & ACCEPTANCE

The first thing to do during mindfulness is to "Watch your thoughts". Quietly observe your thoughts. Be a spectator, don't control them. Let thoughts freely float into your mind. Be **aware** of what your mind wants to focus on but don't get attached.

You might get interested or excited by some thoughts that come up in meditation. Before you know it, you're planning the rest of your day, or thinking up some snarky comment you should have said in an argument. It's ok, this happens. But as soon as you notice, you want to catch yourself and redirect.

Instead of clinging to your "important" thoughts, just tell them, "I'll come back to you" If the thought is important, you'll remember it later.

The step of Awareness reveals the priorities you have locked within your mind. The more you meditate the more you will see your priorities shift from non-controllable elements of your life to the controllable ones.

Awareness and Acceptance happen simultaneously. As thoughts come into your mind don't push them away.

There is a rule in the mind: What you resist persists.

Let's try an experiment - for the next 30 seconds, whatever you do, don't think about a purple elephant. Go ahead and try.

You couldn't do it right?

If you go into meditation trying to have an empty mind, every little thought is a problem, and you feel like an instant failure. You start beating yourself up for being no good at this meditation thing.

Meditation is not to about having a clear mind free of thoughts. The goal is to have a clear perspective, free of judgement.

Instead of fighting with your thoughts, just let your thoughts come and go like watching clouds in the sky.

Here is a classic illustration from Zen:

If you swim in a pond and stir up a bunch of dirt in the water, what do you do to get it clear again?

Nothing. You just let it be and after a little while, it clears itself. Anything you try to do to the pond to get it still would just stir it up again.

Letting your thoughts be, you come into harmony with your thoughts. You will notice them, and they won't bother you. You won't be afraid of them, because you know that they will come and leave you. You won't be identified with them, or let them control you. You will see, you are not your thoughts.

STAGE 2 – APPRECIATION & AFFIRMATION

The first stage of Mindfulness allows the deep-rooted thoughts of our mind to rise to the surface. We willingly confront the feelings associated with these thoughts and learn how to put them into a clear perspective. We accept them and let them move on. This process prepares the mind to have more room to be filled with goodness.

A healthy mind is achieved when we frequently attach importance to the good in our lives. The second stage of Mindfulness directs your attention to appreciation and affirmation.

There is no better way to reduce stress and tension than to show gratitude. It is impossible for you to feel grateful and discontent at the same time.

Direct your thoughts to the people and things in your life that bringing you joy. As you daily remind yourself of what you appreciate you begin to realize your life is so much better than you original thought.

A continuation of the Appreciation step is to seek out ways to outwardly show your gratitude. Specifically tell the people in your life that are bringing goodness into your day how much you appreciate them. Gratitude outwardly expressed can heal anger, sadness and anxiety.

A great way to finish your mindfulness session is to repeat phrases of Affirmation. This involves connecting with how you perceive yourself.

Repeating phrases like "I love who I am" and "I am proud of myself" have great power in building you sense of self-worth and confidence. We so deeply desire to hear these types of phrases from others, but it starts with hearing it from ourselves.

Additionally, you can focus on affirming the things you want to become by saying phrases like "I am strong", "I am capable", "I am kind", "I am happy", etc.

These simple phrases plant the seeds of goodness within your mind and they will grow within you throughout the day. If you repeat these words daily they will transform from things you simply say, to things that you know you are.

WHY MEDITATE

From a scientific perspective, how does meditating affect your body?

Does it really do anything?

It all starts in the brain! During meditation, brain-scans see increased activity in regions directly correlated with decreased anxiety and depression, along with increased pain tolerance.

The Default Mode Network, in particular, is activated when one's mind is at rest and not focusing on the outside world, and has been found to improve memory, self awareness and goal setting.

Meditating also changes your brain waves - and we can measure these frequencies. Meditators have higher levels of Alpha waves, which have been shown to reduce feelings of negative mood, tension, sadness and anger. And if that wasn't enough, it also physically changes our brain shape and size. Studies found that after 8 weeks of a meditation program, gray matter was more dense in areas associated with learning, memory processing, and emotion regulation. And yet the amygdala, which deals with stress, blood pressure and fear, had decreased gray matter! When we look at the entire body, not only do we see decreased blood pressure, but it can also increase the variability of your heart rate. While this may sound harmful, it actually plays a critical role in properly transporting Oxygen and Carbon Dioxide throughout your body.