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**Practice mindful meditation**

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## How to practice mindful meditation



Beginning a mindful meditation practice couldn't be simpler: take a good seat, pay attention to the breath, and when your attention wanders, return.

To start, find a good spot in your home or apartment, ideally where there isn't too much clutter and you can find some quiet. Leave the lights on or sit in natural light. You can even sit outside if you like, but choose a place with little distraction.

At the outset, it helps to set an amount of time you're going to "practice" for. Otherwise, you might think too much about when to stop, and end up distracted. If you're just beginning, it can help to choose a short time, such as two, five or ten

minutes. Eventually, you can build up to twice as long, then maybe up to 45 minutes or an hour. Use a kitchen timer or the timer on your phone.

Many people do a session in the morning and in the evening, or one or the other. If you feel your life is busy and you only have a little time, remember that doing some is better than doing none. When you get a little space and time, you can do a bit more.

## How to Sit

Here's a posture practice that can be used to begin a meditation practice, or simply as something to do for a minute, maybe to stabilize yourself and find a moment of relaxation before going back into the fray. If you have injuries or other physical difficulties, you can modify this to suit your situation.

1. **Take your seat.** Whatever you're sitting on — a chair, a meditation cushion, a park bench — find a spot that gives you a stable, solid seat, so you aren't balancing on the edge of your seat, or leaning back.
2. **Notice what your legs are doing.** If on a cushion on the floor, cross your legs comfortably in front of you. (If you already do some kind of seated yoga posture, go ahead and do what you like to do.) If on a chair, it's good if the bottoms of your feet are touching the floor.
3. **Straighten — but don't stiffen — your upper body.** The spine has a natural curve. Let it be there. Your head and shoulders can comfortably rest on top of your back and spine.
4. **Hang your arms to your sides, so your upper arms fall straight down the sides of your torso.** Then let your hands drop onto the tops of your thighs. If you keep your upper arms at your sides, your hands will land in the right spot. Too far forward will make you hunch. Too far back will make you stiff (you can try these variations and see for yourself). You're tuning the strings of your body — not too tight and not too loose.
5. **Drop your chin a little and let your gaze fall gently downward.** You may let your eyelids lower. If you feel the need, you may lower them completely, but it's not necessary to close your eyes when meditating. You can simply let what appears before your eyes be there without focusing on it.

6. **Be there for a few moments.** Relax. Bring your attention to your breath or to the sensations in your body.
7. **Feel your breath** — or some say “follow” it — as it goes out and as it goes in. (Some versions of this practice put more emphasis on the outbreath, and for the in breath you simply leave a spacious pause.) Either way, draw your attention to the physical sensation of breathing: the air moving through your nose or mouth, the rising and falling of your belly, or your chest. Choose your focal point, and with each breath, you can mentally note “breathing in” and “breathing out.”
8. **Inevitably, your attention will leave the breath and wander to other places.** Or your nose might itch, or a sound outside might distract you. Don’t worry. There’s no need to block or eliminate thinking and feeling. When you get around to noticing your mind wandering — in a few seconds, a minute, five minutes — just gently return your attention to the breath.
9. **Practice pausing before making any physical adjustments,** such as moving your body or scratching an itch. With intention, shift at a moment you choose, allowing space between what you experience and what you choose to do.
10. **You may find your mind wandering constantly** — that’s normal, too. Instead of wrestling with or engaging with those thoughts as much, practice observing without needing to react. Just sit and pay attention. As hard as it is to maintain, that’s all there is. Come back over and over again without judgment or expectation.
11. **When you’re ready, gently lift your gaze (if your eyes are closed, open them).** Take a moment and notice any sounds in the environment. Notice how your body feels right now. Notice your thoughts and emotions. Pausing for a moment, decide how you’d like to continue on with your day.

And that’s it. That’s the practice. It’s often been said that it’s very simple, but it’s not necessarily easy. The work is to just keep doing it.



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