

# **How To Meditate:**

## **A Beginner's Guide**

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### **Introduction**

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Meditation is a spiritual tool that has been used for thousands of years. The principal objective for meditation is to transition one's thoughts from chaotic, emotional, and unpredictable, to focused, organized and calm.

Many who are prompted to begin a meditation practice find it to be an intimidating venture at the outset. This guide is intended to demystify meditation and simplify its implementation.

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### **The Role of Past, Present and Future**

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Have you ever found that time disappeared while doing any of the following: playing with a dog, stopping to smell flowers, watching the sun set, feeding ducks in a park, painting, playing music, or dancing to your favorite music? If so, it is likely that you did so with intention and a clear mind.

Any of the preceding activities can be examples of meditation. The key feature among these practices is how the mind is focused while engaging in them. If while engaging in these activities, your mind is completely focused on the task at hand and you are present in the moment, that is meditation.

To be completely present in this exact moment, it is impossible to be thinking about events of the past or what might take place in the future. There is only room in the mind to focus on a single time frame at any given moment. To be a successful meditator, it is important to continually bring your thoughts away from the past and future, and towards the here and now.



### For More Advanced Users: Altar Preparation

Utilizing an altar in your meditation practice is an excellent way to focus your awareness. Altars are not necessary but are a useful tool in meditation. Place a small table in a quiet place that may be used as a dedicated space. Cover the table with a cloth or sheet.

Place items on the altar that will either improve your focus or are centered on love and gratitude. Examples are singing bowls, pictures of loved ones, candles, tea sets, religious items, and incense burners. These items are useful for stimulating your senses or thoughts, in a gentle way, and bringing awareness to the present moment.

Use these items as you settle into your meditation. For example, light a candle; then, watch the flame flicker for a few moments before closing your eyes. While engaging in your practice, think about the scent of the candle and gratitude for your ability to experience it.

## Meditation Step-by-Step Instructions

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### Step 1: Minimizing Distractions

- ◆ Find a quiet place to begin your meditation.
- ◆ Turn off the television, radio, cell phone, etc.
- ◆ If you live with others who may enter your space and disturb your focus, communicate with them ahead of time and ask not to be interrupted.
- ◆ Attempt to complete any urgent tasks before beginning your meditation, so that your mind does not focus on what must be completed.



**Tip:** Digestion can make people tired; it is recommended to avoid meals for 1-2 hours prior to your meditation.

*Step 1 Continued on Following Page*

Meditation is versatile and can be performed anywhere, even in the harshest of conditions; however, the easiest way to begin your practice, is to do so in a place with few distractions. It is useful to remember that no one can plan for everything. Simply do your best to eliminate distractions and exercise patience if they do arise.

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## Step 2: Body Positioning

- ◆ Be seated, not lying down.
- ◆ Maintain posture: keep back as straight as possible without straining.
- ◆ Wear comfortable clothing that won't cause you any distraction.



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## Step 3: Setting a Time Limit

- ◆ Set a reasonable time limit to maximize likelihood of continuing your practice.
- ◆ Begin with 3-5 minutes.
- ◆ Slowly work up to 10-30 minutes.

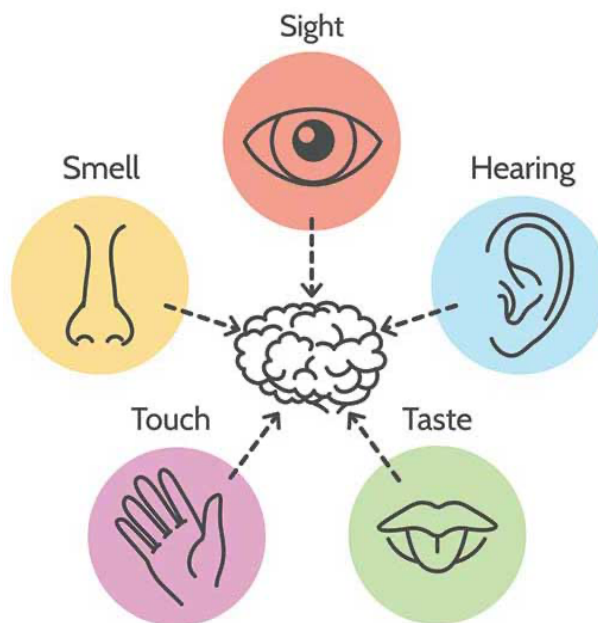


Just like beginning a physical exercise regimen, it is unwise to begin with a long session. It can be useful to set a timer with a subtle alarm sound, like a bell ringing, so you aren't startled. Timers such as these are available on many electronic devices, but any audible timer will work.

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#### Step 4: Noticing Your Body

- ◆ Bring your awareness to your body's five senses.
- ◆ Examine what you experience around you; it is recommended to focus on pleasant things for which you are grateful.



Mindfulness meditation centers on being a casual observer of yourself and your surroundings.

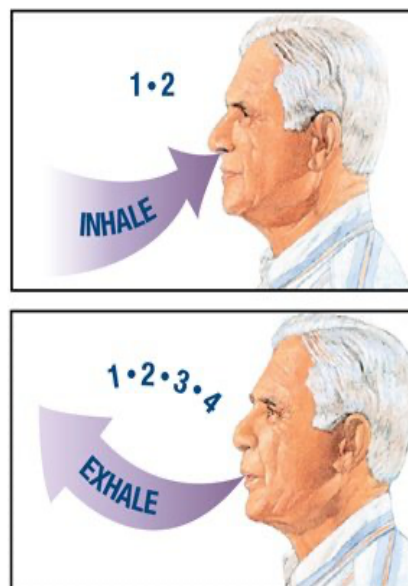
Before closing your eyes, gently move your gaze around the room. Think about what you see. Listen to your surroundings. Think about what you hear. Particularly focus on pleasant noises, like a bird singing. Feel yourself breathing in and out, your lungs expanding and contracting. Focus on gratitude for the air filling your lungs. Bring your awareness to your body's feelings of comfort and warmth. Continue to notice your senses throughout the session.

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#### Step 5: Focusing on Your Breath

- ◆ Breathe deeply. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- ◆ Fill your lungs entirely, then empty your lungs entirely.
- ◆ Count as you breathe. Inhale to the count of 2; exhale to the count of 4.

**Tip:** If you find these numbers difficult to use, feel free to use others. For example, inhale to the count of 3 and exhale to the count of 6. The rule of thumb is for your exhale to take twice as long as your inhale.



*Step 5 Continued on Following Page*

Focusing on the breath is one of the most important skills in meditation. Allow your mind to follow the air's path. Focus your attention on the air directly outside of your nostrils. Then, as you inhale, visualize the air entering your nose, filling your lungs, and slowly exiting your lungs through your windpipe, through your mouth, and into the surrounding air.

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### Step 6: Noticing when Your Mind Has Wandered

- ◆ Expect that your mind will wander while engaging in meditation.
- ◆ The best method to address these thoughts is to acknowledge their existence and simply move on.
- ◆ Create an inner dialogue. Say to yourself within your mind, without moving your physical body, “Hello [thought], I acknowledge your presence, but right now I cannot give you my focus.”



Even expert meditators experience wandering minds. Thoughts do not disappear with practice; you will simply become better able to acknowledge and dismiss these thoughts.

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### Step 7: Being Kind to Your Wandering Mind

- ◆ Understand that it is common to become frustrated with intruding thoughts.
- ◆ Be patient with yourself.



## Step 8: Closing Your Meditation

- ◆ Mentally scan your body and notice how you feel.
- ◆ Place folded hands at your heart and bow your head slightly, as seen in the picture.
- ◆ Reflect on positive thoughts.
- ◆ Take a deep breath and slowly open your eyes.
- ◆ Carry your gratitude into the next part of your day.



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## Beneficial Outcomes

There are many beneficial outcomes, both mental and physical, that can be observed after practicing meditation even just a few times. Such outcomes include:

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|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| ◆ Reduces Stress           | ◆ Controls Anxiety         |
| ◆ Improves Self-Image      | ◆ Decreases Blood Pressure |
| ◆ Increases Optimism       | ◆ Improves Sleep           |
| ◆ Enhances Self-Awareness  | ◆ Fights Addictions        |
| ◆ Lengthens Attention Span | ◆ Increases Pain Tolerance |
| ◆ Improves Memory          | ◆ Increases Compassion     |

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If you have any trouble with this guide or would simply like more information on improving your meditation practice, contact your local Buddhist temple or meditation center.

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