

A Beginners Guide to Breathing Meditation

Welcome to our simple guide aimed at people who want to discover the many benefits of meditation. If you are unfamiliar with meditation you will soon find out for yourself how this ancient and wonderful practice is an antidote to modern-day living. You will quickly wonder how you ever managed without it. If you already have some familiarity with meditation then this easy to understand guide will still be helpful, especially if you haven't meditated for a while and want to re-discover the benefits.

There are many different meditation methods and various schools of thought. Some use a mantra, or repeated phrase or word, some focus on an object, perhaps a candle flame and some meditation will concentrate on an idea.

Breathing meditation, as the title suggests, concentrates on the breath. We all need to breathe and therefore the simplicity of concentrating on your breath is accessible to everyone. If you breathe and sit down you can learn how to meditate!

Meditation Benefits

With regular practice you can expect to experience the following benefits:

- Calmer mind
- Relaxed and energised body
- Less chaotic thoughts
- Clearer focus and concentration
- Better sleep
- Feel better about yourself

Some Common Myths

- **Meditation is part of religion.** Although some recognised religions practise and promote meditation you do not have to be religious or affiliated to a particular religion to meditate. Anyone can meditate.
- **Learning how to meditate takes months, if not years.** Nothing could be further from the truth. You can learn how to meditate in a remarkably short period of time.
- **Meditation practice takes up too much time.** Ten to fifteen minutes per day is quite sufficient. If you are happy to find 20 minutes this will also work well. The key is to practise regularly.
- **Meditation requires cushions, particular clothes and a special room.** You can meditate literally anywhere. Sitting in your car (safely parked of course!), your hotel room, at your desk, on the beach etc.
- **To meditate properly you have to sit on the floor.** You can sit on a chair, preferably straight-backed not armchair.



Is there a best time of day to meditate?

This is really up to the individual. For some people first thing in the morning is an ideal time. For others they may have to get children off to school or catch an early train, so later in the day would be more suitable. We would recommend, if possible, starting the day with a meditation session, before the day's events have time to crowd in and before you are physically tired. First thing in the morning does not have to be at the crack of dawn. If you can't meditate before the day begins don't let this put you off starting in the first place. Whatever time of day you choose you will still reap the rewards. The key is regularly and consistently. Try not to meditate immediately after a meal as your body will be concentrating on digesting food!

So how do I start?

- 1) Initially set aside 15-30 minutes at a time that suits you best. Once you are more familiar with the actual practice of meditating this can be reduced if you wish. Use a room you feel comfortable in and a where you are less likely to be interrupted. The environment should be as relaxing as possible. Turn off your mobile phone and put your house/office phone on to receiving messages mode. Sit on a dining chair or good office chair. This is to ensure you can sit up straight to enable you to breathe properly. Make sure the room is warm but not stuffy. You don't want to fall asleep – although this often happens in the early stages!
- 2) Sit up straight, without strain. Keep both feet flat on the floor and rest your hands lightly in your lap. Lower, or close, your eyes. Most people find closing their eyes to be best. This is to avoid distraction.
- 3) Be aware of your breathing. Put your concentration on your breathing whilst breathing naturally. There should be no strain. Now take 2/3 easy deep breathes. **You are ready to start meditating.** Concentrate on the sensation of your breath as it enters and leaves your nostrils. Breathe naturally throughout, always returning your attention to the sensation of your breath as it enters and leaves your nostrils. There should be no sense of strain or effort.
- 4) As different thoughts arise – as they will – simply return your attention to your breath. Everyone who meditates losses concentration from time to time. Even those who are experienced. Accept this as part of the process and **gently** return to the breath.
- 5) If you find that images start to intrude visualise a place that calms you. Perhaps a beautiful beach, peaceful stream or fabulous mountain. Once you feel more settled return your attention to the breath.
- 6) At first you may need to keep a watch close by to check the time. When you first start to meditate around 10 minutes of breathing concentration is probably sufficient. As you progress try for 15 minutes. You may find 20 minutes or more has passed by!



- 7) For the last few minutes of your meditation practice contemplate that the nature of your mind is like a still, calm, clear and perfect pool of water. When we have stressful and distracting thoughts the water is churned up and we can't see the nature of our mind, or anything else, very clearly. Meditating helps to return our mind to it's natural state.
- 8) To end your meditation session slowly open your eyes and bring your awareness back into the room. Gently stretch your arms above your head and slowly, in your own time, stand up and resume your daily activities. Appreciate the precious time you have spent meditating and the time you will spend in the future.

Some final thoughts

Meditation **practice** is exactly that. As you progress with your meditation you may find some sessions don't flow as easily you would like them to. You may feel you are not making progress. You may even feel you are regressing. Accept this as part of the learning process. Some people say they can't meditate because as soon as they start they have too many thoughts going on. This actually indicates that the meditation is working! Why? As soon as you concentrate on your breath you are giving your mind some work to do. You are in effect making your mind more aware. As soon as we increase our awareness we notice things more acutely.

Meditation is of immense benefit. Try to avoid becoming too critical of your own progress. After all it is unlikely you will become, or want to become, a Zen master overnight. Do meditation for it's own sake. There is no need to impress yourself or anyone else.

Meditation should never be an endurance test. If you benefit from 15 minutes of meditation there is no need to be continually striving for longer sessions and assuming that 60 minutes will be even better.

And finally; don't expect immediate results. What is more likely to happen is that you will find yourself feeling calmer in situations that would previously had you agitated and annoyed. You may also find that individuals who 'wind you up' no longer have that power. With regular meditation practice you will have clearer more focused thoughts, feel more relaxed and comfortable with yourself and fully appreciate this precious human life.

Wishing you a peaceful and joyous mind

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