



Meditation 101

Contemporary life is more and more reliant on non-stop streams of information from our electronic devices. As constant stimulation becomes the norm, people crave a way to unplug and give their minds a rest. Meditation offers one way to do this, and it is a great way to increase your resilience to stress. If you have anxiety, it will help reduce your general tendency towards physiological over-arousal and calm your nervous system.

Regular meditation boosts health, including reduced anxiety and depression; improved memory and attention; and even reduces chronic pain. So how do you learn to meditate?

There are many different schools of meditation, each with its own methodology. The technique of observing your breath described below is based on the Buddhist tradition.

1. **Designate a time.** Many people like to meditate first thing in the morning, but if some other time of day is better for you, go with it! Just make sure you pick a time when you can consistently devote yourself to this practice. Start small with three to five minutes.
2. **Create the space.** Select a location away from household distractions and silence your phone. You'll also need a timer that will sound at the end of your session so that you're not constantly checking the clock to see how much time you have left.
3. **How to sit.** If you sit on the floor, keep your back straight and sit in the crossed-leg position. If you can't sit on the floor, find a chair where you can sit up straight with both feet resting flat on the floor.
4. **Hand positions.** Place your hands in your lap or on your knees with the palms up or down. Find a position that is comfortable for you.
5. **What to do.** Assume your seat and close your eyes. Begin to observe your breath without changing it. There is a tendency to want to deepen your breathing as soon as you notice it. Resist this urge. Focus all your attention on your inhales and exhales, maybe zeroing in on the sensation of air moving in and out of your nostrils. When your thoughts intrude, try picturing them floating away before returning your attention to your breathing. When your mind starts to wander, as it will inevitably, notice your thoughts and then release them.
6. **How long.** When you first start, set your timer for five minutes. If it's hard for you to stay attentive to the breath for that length of time, work on that before increasing the duration. When you are ready, begin to add one minute to your sitting time. Slowly work up to 10 minutes and then 20 minutes.
7. **How to finish.** When your timer sounds, open your eyes. Take just a few moments to notice how you feel after your session. If you are stiff after sitting, slowly stretch your major muscle groups.