



The 14-Day Meditation Challenge

Discover the power
of committing
to your well-being.

BY NICOL NATALE

How do you normally start your day? So often many of us start scrolling through social media before we're even fully awake, or

jump right onto our computers with a cup of coffee. Well, for today and the next 14 days, we're asking you to slow down and live life more mindfully. Despite being called a challenge—and yes, meditating is challenging to most, especially in the beginning—the next two weeks are really an invitation to come back into yourself so you can kick stress, sleep better, feel more focused, and become more present.

If you struggle with racing thoughts, you're certainly not alone. Not only are we never taught to tame our restless minds, but with technology like social media and TV, we're also bombarded with information all day long, leading to overstimulation. "When our thoughts and stressors kick into a negative spiral, it is rarely what is happening now that is the problem. Most of the time, we are ruminating about mistakes we've made in the past, hurts inflicted on us in the past, or worries about what might happen in the future that we

may not be able to control," says Lori Ryland, Ph.D., licensed clinical psychologist and chief clinical officer at Pinnacle Treatment Centers. "A daily meditation practice improves our ability to return to the present moment and improve our response to now."

Prevention's 14-Day Meditation Challenge is broken up into two main portions: The first week will focus on cultivating mindfulness, while the second week invites you to deepen your meditation practice. "Mindfulness is commonly defined as paying attention intentionally without judgment," says Richard Davidson, Ph.D., founder of Center for Healthy Minds and Healthy Minds Innovations. Mindfulness practices can include setting intentions, practicing yoga, scanning your body to check in with how you're feeling, or simply allowing yourself to experience the present moment using all of your senses. "Meditation, on the other hand, refers to a family of diverse methods to investigate the mind for the purpose of enhancing human flourishing," says Davidson. This challenge will allow you to explore various types of meditation so you can find the ones that help you feel better.



Before we begin, it's important to note that **there is absolutely no wrong way to meditate.**

Your commitment to being a better version of yourself is enough—and you'll have plenty of tools over the next two weeks to help you find what that is.

Prep for Success

You can pretty much meditate wherever and whenever, but there are a few optional tools that we recommend using as you go through the next 14 days of meditations. From eating mindfully to practicing gratitude to breathing deeply, each day will offer a new type of meditation aimed at cultivating mindfulness or deepening your meditation practice. Collect these tools if you can, but it's totally OK if you don't.

- Paper and pen
- Yoga mat or towel
- Timer (your cellphone works great!)
- Pillow to sit on
- Soothing music (YouTube has a ton of free soundtracks!)
- Water
- Access to a calming environment

We also recommend...

- A smile (this is meant to be fun!)
- Willingness to learn
- Commitment to holding yourself accountable for two weeks

WEEK 1

Cultivate Mindfulness

During your first week of this challenge, you'll focus on being more present in your everyday life. That means taking time to notice the world around you—and how you are feeling in the moment.





DAY 1:

Set an Intention

To live a more mindful life, it's important to map out why you do certain activities that are a part of your day-to-day. Sometimes, we go through our activities of daily living without intention, which can lead to feelings of boredom, anxiety, and uncertainty about our future. Think about a goal you've achieved in the past, such as planting an abundant vegetable garden. If you had not set that goal, you would not have taken the active steps to reach success and create delicious meals for your family with homegrown vegetables. Without setting intentions, you're essentially exerting your energy anywhere but in the direction of your

goals—it's like getting into a car with nowhere to go. Mapping out intentions gives you the clarity you need to work toward your goals in life, whatever they may be.

So today, we're encouraging you to set an intention for the next 14 days of *Prevention's* Meditation Challenge. Think about why you are starting this challenge—it's likely you want to improve your life in some way. "How can you celebrate success if you don't define it first?" says Emily Fletcher, best-selling author, expert in meditation, and founder of Ziva Meditation and zivaKIDS. "I like to tell my students at Ziva that we meditate to 'get good at life' not to 'get good

at meditation.” Would you like to reduce stress? Do you want to feel more present in your body? Are you looking to get better sleep? “Getting clear on the goal can help you find the motivation to begin (and stick with) this challenge,” Fletcher says.

For this challenge, we’re asking you to focus on one goal, even though you may encounter a number of additional benefits after

committing to a meditation practice for two weeks. Keeping one goal in mind helps you focus your energy on that specific intention, rather than worrying about achieving a number of goals. Keep it simple—that way you can reap all of the delicious benefits of meditating every day instead of turning the challenge into yet another “task” added to your already lengthy to-do list.

How to Set an Intention

By Emily Fletcher, founder of Ziva Meditation and zivaKIDS

- 1. GROUND YOUR BODY.** Close your eyes and take a deep breath into your belly. Take an inventory of your body starting from your toes and working all the way up to the crown of your head.
- 2. IMAGINE HOW YOU WOULD LOVE TO FEEL EACH DAY OF THIS CHALLENGE.** More present with your partner? Joyful at work? Tuned in to your purpose on this planet? Imagine this dream as if it’s happening now.
- 3. NOW REPEAT THE INTENTION.** For instance, you might say: “I am grateful for everything I have. I am excited for what’s on the way.”
- 4. WRITE DOWN YOUR INTENTION.** Place it somewhere you see often, like on your desk or on your bathroom mirror.



DAY 2:

Try Mindful Eating

Mindfulness calls us to be present in every moment of the day, including while we eat. How often do you rush through mealtime, scarfing down your food while you work? We're all guilty of this, but according to clinical psychologist Susan Albers, Psy.D., taking the time to be present while you eat not only teaches you to listen to and take care of your body, but also can help you lose weight and create a better relationship with food.

The secret to eating better for your health is not about what you're eating; it's about how you're eating, Albers says. "I ask my clients not to change anything about what they are eating—the only task is to be aware of how and why they are eating," she says. "You allow yourself to eat the foods you love, but in a new way." So, instead of avoiding french fries, people start to manage the feelings that drive them to eat them, and they begin to see changes such as weight loss, Albers says.

How to Eat More Mindfully

1. HAVE A SEAT WHILE YOU EAT.

Think about how often we stand in front of the pantry, munching. Instead, sit and ground yourself, Albers says. "Place your finger at the top of your plate and run it around the edge of the plate until you reach the top again," she says. "As you do so, breathe in. Notice how much more focused you become."

2. USE YOUR OPPOSITE HAND.

"Sometimes we simply inhale our food without even stopping for a moment. One way to slow down your eating is to eat with your nondominant hand," Albers says. Savor those bites.

3. SMILE BETWEEN BITES.

"Smiling can create a brief pause between your current bite and the next one. During that gap, ask yourself if you are satisfied. This—not feeling full—is what you're aiming for," Albers says. Studies have also shown that smiling, whether real or forced, does make you happier; that, Albers explains, helps reduce mindless eating, emotional eating, and cravings.



DAY 3:

Reflect on What You're Thankful For

There are so many things to be grateful for that often go unnoticed—the sun that shines and gives us warmth, the clean water we have to drink and shower with. And there are some amazing benefits to showing appreciation. “Making gratitude a daily practice is like taking a vitamin,” says David DeSteno, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at Northeastern University in Boston and author of *Emotional Success*. He’s not being hyperbolic: He means it’s like an actual vitamin, making your body work better.

In one study, subjects who kept gratitude journals for just two weeks slept better and had lower blood pressure readings. Even people who are very sick can benefit from feeling grateful: Another study found that older adults who had early-stage heart failure had more consistent heart rates as well as lower levels of disease-causing inflammation when they kept gratitude journals.

How to Practice Gratitude

There are many ways to practice gratitude: keeping a gratitude journal, trying an app like Gratitude Journal, or sharing your appreciation out loud. For today, we suggest pulling out a piece of paper and creating a list of 10 things you’re grateful for in this moment. But, rather than just list them out like a laundry list, stop and contemplate why you feel grateful for each thing and be as specific as possible. For instance: “I’m grateful for my new neighbor, who helped me dig out my car in the freezing cold.”

—Additional reporting by Jennifer King Lindley



DAY 4:

Spend 20 Minutes Walking in Nature

There's a reason why beaches are one of the most beloved vacation spots—nature leads to relaxation.

Because of the measurable physical and psychological benefits of being outside, experts around the world are beginning to prescribe spending time in nature to those in need of healing. The Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries was onto this decades ago when it coined the term *shinrin-yoku*, a.k.a. “forest bathing,” which describes the process of spending time in forests. According to the ministry and numerous studies, there are plenty

of science-backed reasons to go outside:

WALKING IN NATURE REDUCES STRESS.

Stress levels are higher than ever, and walking in nature may help you find calm. A study published in *Frontiers in Psychology* had participants walk outside for 10 minutes or more and found that walking 20 to 30 minutes a day can significantly lower levels of cortisol, a.k.a. the stress hormone. While cortisol is beneficial for regulating blood sugar and boosting energy levels, high levels of this hormone can lead to anxiety, weight gain, heart disease, and more.

EXPOSURE TO FORESTS MAY BOOST OUR IMMUNE SYSTEMS.

Breathing in fresh air allows you to take in phytoncides, or airborne chemicals that plants release to protect themselves against disease; several studies have shown that these have positive effects on humans as well, including by increasing our white blood cell count.

SPENDING TIME IN NATURE LOWERS BLOOD PRESSURE. High blood pressure

puts us at risk for heart disease, strokes, and more, and being in the calming presence of trees may lower your blood pressure naturally. A study published in *Environmental International* examined the blood pressure rates of those who lived in less urbanized areas with plenty of green space compared to those who didn't and found that overall greenness resulted in 30% to 40% lower odds of hypertension and hypotension.

How to Go for a 20-Minute Wellness Walk

By Jennifer Walsh, founder of Walk With Walsh

- Put on comfortable workout gear and lace up your favorite walking shoes. Leave your earbuds at home so you can be fully present in nature.
- Find a nearby park or street with plenty of greenery, and walk for around 20 minutes.
- Observe the sounds, scents, and beauty of your environment. "Once you begin walking in harmony with the nature around you, you will notice that your breathing will be in line with your steps, soft and deep," Walsh says. "The connection between the heart and head is almost immediate."



DAY 5:

Dance!

You can totally dance your way to a better mood. Dancing is a genuine mindfulness practice that connects you with your body and allows you to be fully present—while having a blast. With a rich history dating back thousands of years, dance has long been a powerful means of prayer, expression, and social connection, and the practice has evolved to include ballet, jazz, hip-hop, contemporary, ceremonial, and more. The reason this art form has stuck goes beyond the fact that it's fun—there are plenty of benefits.

For one thing, it gives your brain a boost. One study found that dancing increases the amount of gray matter in the brain—which degrades with age, resulting in cognitive decline—in elderly adults, according to a paper published in *Frontiers in Aging Neuroscience*. Other studies show that dancing increases balance and coordination and reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease. Lisa Fasullo, founder and director of The Center for Transformative Movement, says dancing is an instant mood booster, it

increases confidence, and it stimulates a deeper connection with yourself and others. If you're thinking, *I have no idea how to dance and can't possibly make time for this today*, Fasullo emphasizes there's no wrong way to dance. Freeform dance, a.k.a.

movement meditation, "is a type of dance anyone of any age can do and involves moving your body freely as your mind gets a chance to go on a "mini vacation." So, turn on your favorite music and let's get started!

How to Boost Your Mood with Freeform Dance

By Lisa Fasullo, founder of Ecstatic Groove

- 1. FIND A SPECIAL PLACE.** This can be your favorite room in the house, outside in your backyard, the backseat of a car, or simply anywhere that feels comfortable.
- 2. PICK FEEL-GOOD SONGS.** Select three songs of any genre that light you up and you know will be fun to dance to. Fasullo recommends using headphones, so you can fully tune out distractions and get into the zone more quickly and deeply.
- 3. SMILE.** Simply start with a smile from your eyes first; your mouth will follow. Allow this smile to symbolize giving yourself permission to let go and have fun for a few minutes.
- 4. DANCE!** Stretch, leap, hop, twirl, jump, swap—just let go! Dance however you feel moved to move.
- 5. AFTER YOUR MUSIC ENDS, SIT DOWN AND GENTLY STRETCH.** Allow your heart rate to slow and your breath to return to normal. Sense how your mood has changed and take that renewed sense of energy with you throughout your day.

TIP: If you feel yourself getting self-conscious, throw a "happy tantrum," Fasullo suggests: Channel your inner 3-year-old and let yourself shake, flail, twist, and move through any resistance. Then bring your awareness back to the present moment of the music and your body moving. You did it!



DAY 6:

Do a Body-Scan

How is your body feeling right now? Are you kicking back, enjoying a cup of coffee, or maybe getting ready for bed? By tuning in to your body in this moment, you've just done a simple body-scan, which is a type of meditation that calls you to mindfully scan areas of the body and observe any physical or emotional sensations. Daily mental stress can lead to subconscious physical tensions and tightness in the body, and body-scan meditations can help release these tensions by centering your focus on one body part at a time, says Rach Junard, a Black

Queer femme, meditation expert, and wellness educator.

In addition to helping you become present, directing your focus to various parts of your body during a body-scan meditation can help you:

REDUCE STRESS AND ANXIETY.

Students who listened to a 20-minute body-scan meditation had lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol than those who did not meditate, according to a 2019 study published in *Mindfulness*.

GET BETTER SLEEP. Body-scan meditations may be effective in treating

insomnia, according to another study published in *Mindfulness*. Following a six-week intervention of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) for insomnia and body-scan meditation, teens with insomnia reported sleeping longer and better, waking up less after falling asleep, and being less irritable.

DECREASE CHRONIC PAIN.

Researchers studied the effects of a 10-minute body-scan meditation on those with chronic pain and found that those who listened to the recording reported reduced levels of pain, according to a study published in the *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*.

How to Do a Body-Scan Meditation

By Rach Junard, wellness educator

STEP 1: Lie down on a yoga mat or comfortable surface. Keep eyes closed or maintain a soft gaze to limit visual distractions.

STEP 2: Take some deep breaths. Begin with a long, slow inhale through your nose, expanding your belly and chest. Slowly exhale through your nose, emptying your lungs completely. Continue this breath pattern while drawing attention to bodily sensations, starting with feet and moving up.

STEP 3: Observe sensations and feelings. Let yourself notice any sensations without judgment. As you scan from your feet to the crown of your head, offer nurturing language to yourself with every exhale. This helps you stay present. Try phrases like “I love my feet” or “I love my belly.”

STEP 4: Bring your awareness back to your space. When you are ready, let your breath bring your awareness back into your space. Gently move fingers and toes. Draw your chin from side to side.

STEP 5: Offer yourself a hug by drawing your hands to opposite shoulders and say to yourself, “Thank you for listening.”



DAY 7:

Practice Yoga

Yoga is an ancient practice that remains powerful: It increases your flexibility, connects your body to your mind, and helps bring your awareness to the present moment. It calls for you to hold various postures, focus on maintaining balance, and send breath (a.k.a. pranayama) to various parts of your body. As you move through different flows, your awareness becomes fixated on activating muscle groups using movement and breath as points of focus, bringing you to the present moment right on your mat. And there are plenty of science-backed benefits to getting started.

Not only does practicing yoga work to improve your strength, balance, and flexibility, but studies show that a consistent practice can reduce stress and chronic pain. “Inflammation is often associated with chronic pain conditions, especially autoimmune disorders [where the body’s immune system attacks itself]. Research suggests that yoga can reduce inflammation by decreasing the body’s stress response,” says certified yoga instructor Melanie Iznola, R.N. A small study published in the *Journal of the American Osteopathic Association* examined the effects of

a mindfulness-based stress-reduction program (MBSR) in those with chronic pain. MBSR is an eight-week training program developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D., professor of medicine emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, that combines yoga, mindfulness, and meditation to reduce arousal and

develop a sense of calm. Researchers found that, after eight weeks, mindfulness meditation and hatha yoga were specifically found to improve pain levels, mood, and functional capacity in those with chronic pain and depression. So go from “ah” to “om” with the yoga poses for mindfulness, below, suggested by Iznaola.

How to Cultivate Mindfulness with Yoga

By Melanie Iznaola, R.N., certified yoga instructor



SEATED POSE (SUKHASANA): For this sitting meditation, simply sit with your legs crossed. Focus on elongating the spine and breathing deeply.



FORWARD BEND POSE (PASCHIMOTTANASANA): Start by sitting crossed-legged on your mat. Lengthen from the spine and bend forward to hinge at the hips. Place your arms around your feet or simply relax them on the ground beside your legs. This posture helps relieve stress; calms the mind; stretches the shoulders, spine, and hamstrings; and stimulates the kidneys, liver, ovaries, and uterus.



HERO'S POSE (VIRASANA): This calming pose stretches the hamstrings and quads and lengthens the spine. Start by kneeling, with your butt on your calves. Then, keeping your knees together, separate your feet to either side of your hips, making room for your butt to rest on the floor between your feet. Exhale and lower your butt to sit on the floor between your feet. If at any time you feel knee pain, modify using blocks or bolsters under your butt.

TIP “Listen to your body and never push past your limits. You should never feel joint pain or discomfort,” Iznaola says.

WEEK 2

Deepen Your Meditation Practice

For the next seven days, open your heart and mind
to trying new ways to slow down and find calm.
You deserve this time for yourself.





DAY 8:

Meditate for Three Minutes

By now you should feel like you've started to live more **mindfully**, whether it's being present at mealtime, connecting with your body through mindful movement, or practicing gratitude. This week, you're going to take your meditation practice to the next level. Today you're going to kick off week 2 of Prevention's 14-Day Meditation Challenge with some traditional meditation. Beginning at three minutes,

the goal is to slowly work your way through various types of meditation so you can get a feel for what you enjoy, and also be able to stay in your zen for 15 minutes or more when this challenge is over.

A great place to start is the Ziva technique, created by Emily Fletcher, best-selling author, meditation expert, and founder of Ziva Meditation and zivaKIDS. "It starts with a simple but powerful technique

called 2X breath, which is a way to prepare the body for meditation and strengthen your vagus nerve," she says. The vagus nerve is the body's largest nerve, and it connects the brain to various parts of the body, including the head, neck, and torso. Stimulation of the vagus nerve

through meditation has been found to reduce depression and anxiety and decrease inflammation. Fletcher's 2X breath describes the simple act of inhaling for two counts, then exhaling for four counts. "It allows you to bridge the gap between your physical body and your mind," she says.

How to Meditate for Three Minutes

By Emily Fletcher, founder of Ziva Meditation

- 1. GET COMFY.** Start by sitting comfortably with your back and neck supported and your head free. And no, you do not have to do anything special with your hands; just place them comfortably in your lap or wherever feels best.
- 2. PRACTICE 2X BREATHING.** Once seated, close your eyes and start with the 2X breath by breathing in for two counts, then out for four counts. Repeat 15 times.
- 3. NOTICE THE DIFFERENCE.** Take an inventory of your body and notice how just a few moments moved you into a more de-excited state.



DAY 9:

Recite a Mantra

Think about how many thoughts you have throughout the day—most of the time our brains are swirling with endless thoughts about our to-do lists, stressors that happened in the past, or future events we're anticipating. A mantra-based meditation allows you to bring your focus to the present by meditating on a word or phrase. "During a mantra-based meditation, you are repeating the same phrase over and over again. This can be done silently or by whispering, chanting, or singing aloud," says

Kelsey J. Patel, Reiki expert, author of *Burning Bright*, and host of the *Magik Vibes* podcast. "Mantras are used now by many, with and without spiritual elements, and can be incredibly helpful to slow down the mind and support concentration and clarity."

HOW TO CHOOSE A MANTRA You may be wondering, *How do I even know what to say?* Some people use words from a prayer or a sacred text as their mantras, while others focus on personal affirmations. To choose one for

today, Patel suggests deciding what you really want to work through and coming up with a personal affirmation of the behavior you wish to create. You might choose to say something like, “I am here now,” “I am ready for change,” or “I have all of my answers within.” For those seeking a more spiritual connection, you can

try a simple “Om,” which is a Vedic Sanskrit word derived from Hindu and Buddhist teachings that represents a “supreme power.” A small study published in the *International Journal of Yoga* found that chanting “Om” may help deactivate the right amygdala, a part of the brain associated with negative emotions like fear and sadness.

How to Do a Mantra Meditation

By Kelsey J. Patel, author of Burning Bright

STEP 1: CHOOSE A MANTRA. To get started, take notice of how you're feeling. What are you hoping to invite into your world or release during your practice today? Choose the mantra that will support you in that intention, whether it's a personal mantra or a spiritual one.

STEP 2: FIND A COMFORTABLE POSITION. Sit comfortably in a chair or on a cushion or a mat. Close your eyes and begin to take several long and slow deep breaths. Allow yourself to melt deeper into your mat as you begin to relax.

STEP 3: REPEAT YOUR MANTRA OUT LOUD. With each breath, repeat your mantra over and over again in unison with the natural rhythm of your breath.

STEP 4: REPEAT YOUR MANTRA IN YOUR HEAD. After about 20 recitations out loud, transition to reciting your mantra in your head. As thoughts arise, simply return to your mantra and continue to repeat it in your head as you breathe in and out.

STEP 5: CONTINUE RECITING YOUR MANTRA for three to five minutes, or however long you set aside for your meditation today.



DAY 10:

Meditate for Five Minutes

Today we're going to build on the meditations you've tried so far with a five-minute meditation. You might think that five minutes can't possibly be enough for you to experience any physical or emotional benefits. Well, research says otherwise! A small study published in the *Journal of Psychology and Clinical Psychiatry* found that five minutes of meditation decreased stress levels in mental healthcare professionals. And don't worry about quieting your mind, an idea that gets tossed around with meditation a lot. "It's the nature of the mind to think," explains Emily Fletcher, best-selling author, expert in meditation, and founder of Ziva Meditation and zivaKIDS. Instead, just observe your thoughts without judgment, then let them go, and bring your focus back to the present moment.

How to Do a Five-Minute Meditation

By Emily Fletcher, founder of Ziva Meditation

STEP 1: GET COMFORTABLE.

Sit with your back supported and your head free.

STEP 2: PRACTICE THE 2X BREATH. Close your eyes and start with the 2X breath by breathing in through your nose for two counts, then out through your mouth for four counts. Repeat 15 times.

STEP 3: COME TO YOUR SENSES. Bring your awareness into your body as you move through your five senses. What's the most prevalent sensation for you right now? Can you feel your clothes on your skin? What sounds can you hear from the loudest to the softest? Even with your eyes closed, can you make out any visuals in the blackness? What can you taste right now? What smells can you detect?

STEP 4: TAKE NOTE OF THE DIFFERENCE. Inventory your body and notice how just a few moments moved you into a more de-excited state.



DAY 11:

Focus on an Object

Some of us struggle to corral our wandering thoughts, but practicing a focused-based meditation can help. This is all about bringing your attention to a particular thing during the practice, like the sound of the ocean, a candle, the rhythm of your breath, or an intention, says Kelsey J. Patel, Reiki expert, author of *Burning Bright*, and host of the *Magik Vibes* podcast. “As your mind wanders, you catch the thoughts and then know where to go back to within the practice: your focal point,” Patel says. “What you’re choosing to focus on for your meditation practice does not matter so much as the idea that you are selecting one thing to guide your practice.” Patel adds that a focused-based meditation is great for beginners; the focal point allows you to receive the “incredible and stress-relieving experiences of a meditation practice without the fuss of a wandering mind.”

How to Do a Simple Focused-Based Meditation

By Kelsey Patel, author of *Burning Bright*

STEP 1: Start in a nice, easy, and comfortable position. Set a timer if you like.

STEP 2: Take a few slow and conscious breaths in and out; kindly welcome the body into the meditation.

STEP 3: Decide on your focal point for this practice, such as your breath, a word, a sound, or an object.

STEP 4: As you begin, seal in your focal point by letting your mind have a steady awareness of it. As the meditation continues, notice if your mind wanders and gently guide it back to your focal point.

STEP 5: Close by inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth. You can also express gratitude for something you notice and perhaps commit to sharing your gratitude. Notice if there were any shifts in body, mind, or emotion. Slowly re-enter your day.



DAY 12:

Try Visualization

When you were a kid, remember how easy it was to dream up imaginary worlds? Well, that same technique is used to do a visualization meditation. This type of meditation encourages you to use your imagination to visualize a calming place or pleasant experience, resulting in a range of emotional and physical benefits, says Frances Naude, founder, lead practitioner, and head educator of Four Noble Healing. It can

even make you more successful at completing a task you've visualized, according to a 2017 study published in *Psychology*. And, because visualization meditation provides you with a momentary "escape" from reality, this type of meditation naturally reduces stress and anxiety, a 2018 study published in *Frontiers in Psychology* found.

Plus, Naude says this type of meditation is great for beginners. "Many times, people give up their meditation practice because they struggle to stop their thoughts from flowing through their minds. While this is 100% normal during traditional meditation, it can be very frustrat-

ing and disheartening for the person trying to meditate," she says. With visualization, however, you're able to drop into a meditative state through attention, not silence. "By giving the mind something to focus on, you naturally quiet out the 'noise,' and you are more likely to drop into that quiet, meditative state through the imagery journey of your imagination."

While you can choose to visualize something you hope to accomplish,

like acing a work presentation, we'll focus today on using visualization to elicit an emotion; in this case, a sense of peace. So, what brings you calmness? If it's the beach, then your visualization can reflect the calmest

beach environment that comes to mind. Perhaps it's a peaceful sunset overlooking the ocean, or a magical green forest. The beauty of visualization is that you can choose any environment that suits you.

How to Do a Visualization Meditation

By Frances Naude of Four Noble Healing

Read through the steps and then go through them in your own way. It's OK if you don't remember the exact words, but focus on the senses you're experiencing. The intention is to allow your imagination to lead you into the subconscious mind. Don't worry about "doing it right."

STEP 1: PREPARE. Sit or lie down, and set an intention: For today, it can be to calm the mind for peace and bliss. Our environment will be a warm beach with tall palm trees, crystal blue waters, and vibrant coral reefs. You may set a timer for 10 minutes, or you might prefer to remain in this state longer; let your intuition guide you.

STEP 2: VISUALIZE. Close your eyes, and begin to breathe deeply. Maybe you can start to smell the salty ocean air or feel the humid warm wind flow through you. Imagine warm sand underneath you, the sound of palms rustling in the wind, the gentle laps of the waves in the distance. Notice all that surrounds you, and when you're ready, envision yourself standing up. Walk mindfully down to the ocean, letting the warm water kiss your toes. Maybe you even want to dive in! Feel the gentle sway and support of the ocean hug you. When you're ready, walk out of the water, and notice how you are warmed by the sun. Walk around, observing shells, birds, dolphins, and other magic. It is just you, and this place, perfectly at peace. Let yourself continue to be here, doing whatever feels the most calming and enjoyable.

STEP 3: RETURN. When you are ready to leave this place, sit or lie back down on the beach, and gently feel the visualization dissipate. Gently bring your awareness back to your body and your surroundings, grounding yourself into reality with your newfound sense of peace.



DAY 13:

Practice 10 Minutes of Deep Breathing

When stressed, your body goes into fight-or-flight mode, preparing you to successfully confront a perceived threat. As a result, the brain releases a hormone called corticotropin releasing hormone (CRH), which sends signals to increase your breathing, heart rate, and blood pressure. Our breath may also become short and shallow, limiting the diaphragm's

range of motion and preventing the lower part of your lungs from receiving oxygenated air. This can lead to feelings of anxiousness.

Here's a way to find calm again: "Deep breathing can help to activate your parasympathetic nervous system, kickstarting relaxation and decreasing both tension and anxiety," says Rach Junard, wellness educator.

A 2020 study published in *Frontiers in Psychiatry* examined three well-being interventions—one included breathing exercises, another was Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), and the third was an emotional intelligence program—and found that those who participated in the program with

deep breathing exercises experienced the greatest improvements in psychological well-being, social connectedness, positive emotions, stress levels, depression, and mindfulness benefits. Deep breathing can even help you sleep better by targeting the autonomic nervous system.

How to Breathe Your Way to Relaxation

By Rach Junard, wellness educator

STEP 1: Find a comfortable seat with adequate spine support. You may like to sit on a pillow against a wall. If you would like soothing music in the background, play it now.

STEP 2: Bring your hands to the tops of your thighs or to your lower belly. Allow yourself to have a soft gaze or closed eyes. Find stillness in your seat as you prepare for breath.

STEP 3: Slowly inhale for the count of 1-2-3-4-5, pause at the top, and then exhale for the count of 1-2-3-4-5. Repeat this for as little or as long as you like. You may begin to notice a calmer state of being.

STEP 4: When you are ready to move on with your day, take in one final deep inhale and exhale. Gently wiggle your fingers and toes as you ground yourself back into your space and open your eyes.



DAY 14:

Meditate for 15 Minutes

You've made it! By now, you've tried a number of meditations, relaxation tools, and visualization techniques. Today, you may move through 15 minutes of your favorite meditation from Prevention's 14-Day Meditation Challenge, or try the meditation here from Emily Fletcher, founder of Ziva Meditation and zivaKIDS. It combines breath work, mindfulness, and visualization.

How to Meditate for 15 Minutes with the Ziva Technique

By Emily Fletcher, founder of Ziva Meditation

STEP 1: GET COMFORTABLE. Sit with your back supported and head free.

STEP 2: PRACTICE THE 2X BREATH. Once seated, close your eyes and start with the 2X breath by breathing in through your nose for two counts, then out through your mouth for four counts. Repeat 20 times, working your way up to an inhale of four counts and an exhale of eight counts.

STEP 3: COME TO YOUR SENSES. Bring your awareness into your body as you move through the five senses. Gently tap into your sense of hearing: What sounds can you

detect? How loud or how subtle? Move to your sense of touch: Can you feel your clothes on your skin? Even with your eyes closed, what are you seeing? What can you taste right now? Lastly, what smells can you detect?

STEP 4: IMAGINE YOUR DREAMS:

Ask yourself, "How would I love to feel right now?" Present with your partner? Joyful at work? Tuned in to your purpose on this planet? Imagine this dream as if it's happening now. Let yourself float in this space.

STEP 5: NOTICE THE DIFFERENCE.

Take an inventory of your body and notice how just a few moments moved you into a more de-excited state.

Reflection

Congratulations! You've completed *Prevention's* 14-Day Meditation Challenge. We want you to now draw your attention back to your intention from Day 1. Pull out a pen and paper and reflect on the questions below:

1. Which meditations did you enjoy the best?
2. What did you find difficult about the 14-Day Meditation Challenge?
3. Think back to your intention from Day 1. Do you feel closer to meeting that goal?
4. What did you learn about yourself through this process?
5. How do you plan to prioritize self-care in the upcoming months?

In the days to come, use the meditations or modified versions of them in your continued practice. There are infinite benefits to carving out time for yourself every single day, and we hope you walk away from the challenge feeling less stressed, more centered, and empowered to reach your goals.

