

Peace of Mind

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Different Meditation Techniques

Basic Meditation

This meditation process is good introduction to inducing a relaxation response. Plan to make meditation a regular part of your daily routine. Set aside 10 to 20 minutes each day at the same time, if possible.

Choose a quiet spot where you will not be disturbed by other people or by the telephone.

Sit quietly in a comfortable position.

Eliminate distractions and interruptions during the period you'll be meditating.

Commit yourself to a specific length of time and try to stick to it.

Pick a focus word or short phrase that's firmly rooted in your personal belief system. A non-religious person might choose a neutral word like tranquility, peace, or love. Others might use the opening words of a favorite prayer from their religion such as 'Hail Mary full of Grace', 'I surrender all to you', 'Hallelujah', 'Om', etc. An affirmation can also be used as the focus, such as, 'I am at peace' or 'I am at peace, I am calm, I am tranquil.'

Close your eyes. This makes it easy to concentrate.

Relax your muscles sequentially from head to feet. This helps to break the connection between stressful thoughts and a tense body. Starting with your forehead, become aware of tension as you breathe in. Let go of any obvious tension as you breathe out. Go through the rest of your body in this way, proceeding down through your eyes, jaws, neck, shoulders, arms, hands, chest, upper back, middle back and midriff, lower back, belly, pelvis, buttocks, thighs, calves, and feet.

Breathe slowly and naturally, repeating your focus word or phrase silently as you exhale.

Assume a passive attitude. Don't worry about how well you're doing. When other thoughts come to mind, simply say, "Oh, well," and gently return to the repetition.

Continue for 10 to 20 minutes. You may open your eyes to check the time, but do not use

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an alarm. After you finish: Sit quietly for a minute or so, at first with your eyes closed and later with your eyes open. Do not stand for one or two minutes.

Plan for a session once or twice a day.

Guided Imagery or Visualization

Your thoughts have a direct influence on the way you feel and behave. If you tend to dwell on sad or negative thoughts, you most likely are not a very happy person. Likewise, if you think that your job is enough to give you a headache, you probably will come home with throbbing temples each day. This is just another clear example of the power the mind exerts over the body.

Your imagination can be a powerful tool to help you combat stress, tension, and anxiety. You can use visualization to harness the energy of your imagination, and it does not take long-probably just a few weeks-to master the technique. Try to visualize two or three times a day. Most people find it easiest to do in bed in the morning and at night before falling asleep, though with practice you'll be able to visualize whenever and wherever the need arises.

This form of meditation appeals to those who find peace by picturing themselves in a peaceful place.

Here's how to do it.

Technique

To begin visualization, sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes. Sit up straight. Get into a comfortable position. Either sit on the floor with your back against a wall, or sit in a chair with your feet on the ground and your hands resting on your knees or thighs. Close your eyes. Take a few cleansing breaths. Breathe in slowly and deeply for five counts, then exhale slowly for five counts.

Scan your body for any muscle tension and relax the areas that need it. Take as much time as you need to relax your body. Starting at the top of your head and making your way down to your toes.

As distractions flutter through your mind, remind yourself that you'll deal with them when you are finished meditating.

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Once you feel relaxed, begin to visualize a scene, object, or place that is soothing and pleasing to you. Imagine every aspect of the scene, involving all of your senses. For example, if you like to visualize a waterfall on a mountain, imagine first what this looks like: the rushing water, the stream flowing from it, the size and thickness of the trees all around, the sky above and the sun filtering through the branches, and so on. Then imagine how this place would smell-damp and musty or fragrant pine. Next listen for the sounds you would hear if you were there: the water rushing over rocks, the hush of the wind rising and then quieting down, birds singing and crickets chirping. How does the ground feel beneath your feet? Is it rocky and rough, or soft and smooth from pine needles or moss? Imagine chewing on a blade of grass, or taking a long, cool drink from the water-fall. How do these taste? Say to yourself, "I am relaxed . . . my worries are gone . . . tension has flowed out of my body." Take in all of the sights, sounds, smells, and feelings of this special place. You can return here whenever you want to. Repeat to yourself, "I am relaxed here . . . this is my favorite place."

As you become more involved in your visual image, your body will relax and you will be able to let go of the problems or worries that you'd felt before. To encourage this relaxation to occur, you can punctuate the images with positive statements, such as "I am letting go of tension" or "I feel calm and relaxed."

When you have thoroughly visualized this place, open your eyes but stay in the same comfortable position. Continue to breathe smoothly and rhythmically, and take a few moments to experience and enjoy your relaxation. Rest assured that your special place is available to you whenever you need to go there.

Most people will benefit from a 5- to 15-minute meditation practiced most days of the week. A good rule of thumb for practicing journey meditation is to do it in the morning and then again later in the day. A peaceful meditative journey as you wake up can improve the whole tone of your day.

Journey meditation is also an excellent antidote for afternoon slump. Most people find that at about 3.00 PM, they are at their lowest energy level for the day. This is a good time to take a short nap or to take a short journey break. In as little as ten minutes, you'll find that you've refreshed yourself.

Body Scan Meditation

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People who want to try a more formal type of mindfulness without attending a yoga or tai chi class often use body Scan Meditation.

1. Lie on your back with your legs uncrossed, your arms at your sides, palms up, and your eyes open or closed, as you wish.
2. Focus on your breathing, how the air moves in and out of your body.
3. After several deep breaths, as you begin to feel comfortable and relaxed, direct your attention to the toes of your left foot. Tune into any sensations in that part of your body while remaining aware of your breathing. It often helps to imagine each breath flowing to the spot where you're directing your attention. Focus on your left toes for one to two minutes.
4. Then move your focus to the sole of your left foot and hold it there for a minute or two while continuing to pay attention to your breathing.
5. Follow the same procedure as you move to your left ankle, calf, knee, thigh, hip and so on all around the body.
6. Pay particular attention to any areas that cause pain or are the focus of any medical condition (for asthma, the lungs; for diabetes, the pancreas).
7. Pay particular attention to the head: the jaw, chin, lips, tongue, roof of the mouth, nostrils, throat, cheeks, eyelids, eyes, eyebrows, forehead, temples and scalp.
8. Finally, focus on the very top of your hair, the uppermost part of your body. Then let go of the body altogether, and in your mind, hover above yourself as your breath reaches beyond you and touches the universe.

The Instant Calming Sequence

Meditation and mindfulness are great when you have enough control over your time to enjoy them. But what happens when a crisis requires immediate action?

Using scientific findings in the physiology of relaxation, Dr. Robert Cooper has developed a six-step program that minimizes the negative effects of stress the moment the body begins to feel stressed. He calls it the Instant Calming Sequence.

Step 1: Practice uninterrupted breathing. When stress strikes, immediately focus on your breath and continue breathing smoothly, deeply and evenly.

Step 2: Put on a positive face. Smile a grin that you can feel in the corners of your eyes. "The conventional wisdom is that happiness triggers smiling," Dr. Cooper explains. "But recent studies suggest that this process is a two-way street. Smiling can contribute to

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feelings of happiness, and in a stressful situation, it can help keep you calm." Try this simple test: Smile a broad grin right now. Don't you feel better?

Step 3:: Balance your posture. People under stress often look hunched-over, hence the oft-repeated phrase "They have the weight of the world on their shoulders."

"Maintaining good posture works like smiling," Dr. Cooper says. "Physical balance contributes to emotional balance." Keep your head up, chin in, chest high, pelvis and hips level, back comfortably straight and abdomen free of tension. Imagine a skyhook lifting your body from a point at the center of the top of your head.

Step 4: Bathe in a wave of relaxation. Consciously sweep a wave of relaxation through your body. "Imagine you're standing under a waterfall that washes away all your tension," Dr. Cooper says.

Step 5: Acknowledge reality. Face your causes of stresses head-on. Don't try to deny it or wish that it hadn't happened. Think: "This is real. I can handle it. I'm finding the best possible way to cope right now."

Step 6:: Reassert control. Instead of fretting about how the stressor has robbed you of control, focus on what you can control and take appropriate action. Also, think clear-headed, honest thoughts instead of distorted ones.