



Meditation 101

It's extremely difficult for a beginner to sit for hours and think of nothing or have an "empty mind." But in general, the easiest way to begin meditating is by focusing on the breath — an example of one of the most common approaches to meditation: concentration.

CONCENTRATION MEDITATION

Concentration meditation involves focusing on a single point. This could entail following the breath, repeating a single word or mantra, staring at a candle flame, listening to a repetitive gong, or counting beads on a mala. Since focusing the mind is challenging, a beginner might meditate for only a few minutes and then work up to longer durations.

In this form of meditation, you simply refocus your awareness on the chosen object of attention each time you notice your mind wandering. Rather than pursuing random thoughts, you simply let them go. Through this process, your ability to concentrate improves.

MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

Mindfulness meditation encourages the practitioner to observe wandering thoughts as they drift through the mind. The intention is not to get involved with the thoughts or to judge them, but simply to be aware of each mental note as it arises.

Through mindfulness meditation, you can see how your thoughts and feelings tend to move in particular patterns. Over time, you can become more aware of the human tendency to quickly judge an experience as good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant. With practice, an inner balance develops.

In some schools of meditation, students practice a combination of concentration and mindfulness. Many disciplines call for stillness — to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the teacher.

OTHER MEDITATION TECHNIQUES

There are also guided meditation, moving meditation techniques, such as tai chi, qigong, and walking meditation.

BENEFITS OF MEDITATION

If relaxation is not the goal of meditation, it is often a result. In the 1970s, Herbert Benson, MD, a researcher at Harvard University Medical School, coined the term "relaxation response" after conducting research on people who practiced transcendental meditation. The relaxation response, in Benson's words, is "an opposite, involuntary response that causes a reduction in the activity of the sympathetic nervous system."

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Since then, studies on the relaxation response have documented the following short-term benefits to the nervous system:

- Lower blood pressure
- Improved blood circulation
- Lower heart rate
- Less perspiration
- Slower respiratory rate
- Less anxiety
- Lower blood cortisol levels
- More feelings of well-being
- Less stress
- Deeper relaxation

HOW TO MEDITATE: SIMPLE MEDITATION FOR BEGINNERS

This meditation exercise is an excellent introduction to meditation techniques.

1. Sit or lie comfortably.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Make no effort to control the breath; simply breathe naturally.
4. Focus your attention on the breath and on how the body moves with each inhalation and exhalation. Notice the movement of your body as you breathe. Observe your chest, shoulders, rib cage, and belly. Simply focus your attention on your breath without controlling its pace or intensity. If your mind wanders, return your focus back to your breath.

Maintain this meditation practice for two to three minutes to start, and then try it for longer periods.

Sources:

www.gaiam.com/discover/158/article/meditation-101-techniques-benefits-and-a-beginners-how-to

Inner Revolution Program