

Meditation Basics

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With a little guidance, anyone can meditate almost anywhere. An ancient Eastern method of gaining self-awareness, meditation can produce real benefits in just 10 to 20 minutes per day—including reducing anxiety and fatigue, increasing self-confidence, and normalizing blood pressure.

Meditation gained popularity in the West during the late 1960s and 1970s, but people often still view it as a practice used only by eccentric types. That’s changing, according to Jim Malloy, a full-time meditation teacher in Northern California with more than 25 years of experience.

“Although meditation is no longer just for a select few mystics and reclusive types, it has not yet been totally embraced by the mainstream,” Malloy says. “I am certainly seeing many more people practicing meditation, more doctors recommending it, and more references to it in pop culture and the media.”

People may practice meditation in different forms. But it generally involves carefully focusing your attention in order to alter your state of consciousness, Malloy explains. People use meditation to become more connected with themselves and a “higher power” or “guiding presence.” Those who succeed often report feeling more peaceful and happy, meditation experts say.

Reap the short- and long-term benefits

Meditation experts like Malloy can tick off long lists of the benefits of meditation, both long- and short-term, including:

- relaxation and reduced stress
- increased energy
- normalized blood pressure, heart rate, and cholesterol levels
- increased mental clarity, concentration, and a sense of emotional balance
- enhanced creativity
- ability to handle life situations more effectively
- feeling more connected and “in the flow” with life
- more harmonious relationships
- new insights and perspective about the meaning and purpose of life
- increased intuition
- feeling more supported by a “higher power”

For some people, regular meditation can even lead to other positive lifestyle changes. These changes tend to enhance the process of becoming more conscious, Malloy notes, including improving diet, choosing new forms of entertainment and reading selections, eliminating unhealthy

habits, and starting new forms of exercise such as tai chi or yoga.

“I believe that people should follow their natural inclinations,” he says. “Sometimes these changes are deliberate, but very often the lifestyle changes come about quite naturally as a result of growth taking place.”

Establish a daily routine

Getting started requires a little effort, but try to establish a daily routine:

- **Find a comfortable place to sit**—in a chair, on a cushion, or even on the floor.
- **Try to avoid as much noise and distraction as possible.**
- **Sit with your spine relatively straight.** You can lean against a wall or other support.
- **Prepare yourself for meditation by getting centered or by calling on a “higher power” for assistance,** if that corresponds with your spiritual beliefs.
- **Focus your attention on a phrase (or “mantra”), prayer, an object, your breath, or positive thoughts**—whatever works for you.
- **Gently shift your attention back to focus if your thoughts wander.**
- **Don’t worry about “doing it right.”** Avoid trying to force a certain outcome or completely “blank out” your thoughts, Malloy advises.

If you’re just getting started, meditate for about 10 to 15 minutes each day. Eventually you can increase this period to about 20 minutes.

Do it anywhere

You can meditate almost anywhere, including at work. It helps to have an office or cubicle, but if you don’t, slipping out to your car, a park, or the employee lounge for a meditation break can work, says Malloy, who has trained with such renowned experts as the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

“If you’re self-conscious about meditation in the lounge or at a park, you can pretend to be napping,” he says. “At first, the noise and busyness of the workplace may be distracting, but after a short time you’ll get used to it. Taking just 10 to 15 minutes to meditate after lunch or during a mid-afternoon break can be surprisingly regenerating, and really helpful for avoiding those afternoon lows.”

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