

What is meditation?

It is a discipline which involves deep relaxation and focused attention. Meditation is an attempt to clear your mind of its normal rush of cluttered thoughts. You do this by refocusing your attention on a single thought, phrase, object or activity – usually called the “focal point” of your meditation.

Lawrence LeShan, author of *How to Meditate*, says: “Essentially, the basic technique of meditation is learning to do one thing at a time.”

Why meditate? What are the benefits?

Many people are attracted to meditation because of its health benefits. Stress is a major problem in today’s rapidly changing world. Meditation helps you relax and relieves the negative effects of stress. Regular meditation also can help control high blood pressure.

Meditation provides benefits through your whole day. Research shows that people who meditate regularly have less anxiety and a sense of calm, as well as increased awareness of their environment. Meditation also helps you become more efficient by developing mental discipline. People who meditate tend to be more open-minded, relaxed, aware, and at peace with themselves.



How do I get started?

Learning to meditate is a little like learning backgammon – it’s a skill you can learn in ten minutes, but one that you’ll spend the rest of your life trying to master. Dr. LeShan says, “Nobody ever learns to meditate well. . . . The value is in working at. The path is the goal.”

There are many types of meditation. You should experiment until you find a meditation that works for you, based on your personality, interests, and lifestyle.

For the greatest benefit, it is advisable to meditate every day, preferably at the same time and place. However, you can meditate anywhere, at any time, if you have nothing else to do. Try starting with five minutes a session, and gradually work up to 15 or 20 minutes.

How to Meditate

Start by finding a quiet, pleasant place where you will not be interrupted. Wear loose, comfortable clothing. Remove any tight jewelry, eye-glasses, shoes, etc. Sit in a comfortable chair or on a floor pillow. Keep your back straight to help you breathe fully, and stay awake and alert.

RELAX: Relax all the muscles in your body. Starting with your feet and moving up to your face, think about and consciously relax all your muscles.

BREATHING: Now focus your attention on your breathing. Let your body breathe naturally. Establish a relaxed rhythm, filling your lungs completely with each breath. Be fully aware of your breathing: pay attention to each breath in, each breath out, and the natural space between breaths.

FOCAL POINT: Focus your attention on a single point. It can be your breathing. If you focus on your breath, it may help to count breaths (count only to five or ten, and then go back to one) or repeat the word “relax” on each breath. Your focal point could also be music, a word or phrase, or an object of nature or art. *Always focus on something pleasant and positive.*

ATTITUDE: Adopt a **passive** attitude; when your mind wanders, don’t get upset. There will always be distractions, and your mind will always wander. Try to catch your mind when it wanders, and gently remind yourself to return your attention to your focal point. Try to refocus your attention more quickly each time you meditate.

TRAPS: You may notice sleepiness, itching, daydreaming, feelings of heaviness, ambient noises, and other distractions. Focusing on these distractions is a “trap” which can ruin your meditation. If any of these things occur, gently remind yourself that they’re only distractions, and return to the focus of your meditation. Stay alert and awake. These traps will diminish as you become more experienced at meditation.



When you are finished with your meditation, return slowly to your normal routine. If you need to time your session, set a silent clock in front of you, check it occasionally, and return immediately to your focal point. Do not use an alarm clock with a jarring alarm.

Avoid meditating immediately after eating a large meal, after exercising or when sleepy. Early morning and immediately after work are good times for many people.

GIVE MEDITATION A CHANCE. Like most other positive health habits, meditation does not begin to provide real benefits until you have practiced it regularly for a significant period of time. Commit yourself to practicing daily meditation for at least two months before you make any judgements about its effectiveness.

Recommended Reading

Herbert Benson, M.D. *The Relaxation Response* (New York: Avon Books, 1975).

Lawrence LeShan, Ph.D. *How to Meditate* (New York: Bantam Books, 1986).

Meditation



Meditation is one of mankind’s oldest disciplines for self-improvement. It has roots in both Eastern and Western culture. It is not a religious discipline.