

The Meditation Manual

by Shaman Redwood

*“Peace comes from within. Do not seek it without.”
- the Buddha*

This simple guide will de-mystify the art of **Mindfulness Meditation** and provide clear instructions to establish your own daily practice.

“What is Meditation and why should I try it?”

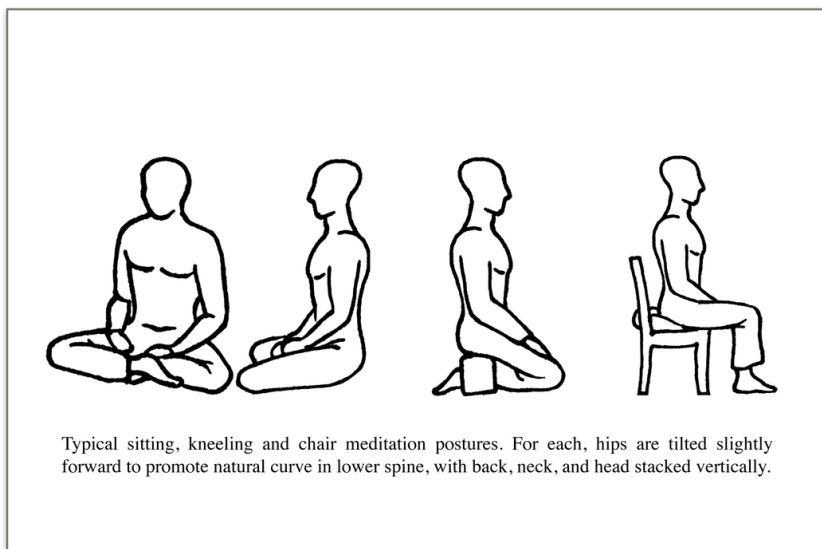
Meditation is a cognitive training exercise developed over three and half thousand years ago to cultivate a joyful mind. The benefits include **tranquility, powerful concentration, and freedom from depression or anxiety**. Meditation can be intimidating, but it’s actually easier than you think. Even doctors and therapists are now prescribing meditation as an effective treatment for mental health issues.

“When & where should I meditate?”

Find a quiet time and place where you won’t be bothered. A cool, dark room in-doors is ideal. **Set a timer**. Beginners can start with 10 to 20 minute sessions. Morning is ideal, but you can meditate in the evening or any other time of day too. Avoid meditating two hours after eating.

“How do I sit during meditation?”

- ☼ **Sit comfortably** with your body upright and your back straight, without leaning forward, backward, or to either side.
- ☼ You can sit cross-legged or kneeling on the floor with a pillow or bench, or sit in a chair—**choose whichever is the most relaxed posture for you**.
- ☼ **Meditation is not an endurance contest**, so do not force yourself to sit in an uncomfortable posture.
- ☼ However, **avoid lying down** for your daily practice, or else you’ll experience drowsiness and fall asleep.
- ☼ **Feel free to move** or adjust positions throughout your meditation session, just **move in slow motion** with mindfulness of your movements.
- ☼ **Rest your hands** palms up on your knees or in your lap, letting your **arms and shoulders relax**.



“How do I begin a meditation session?”

- ✿ **Close your eyes.**
- ✿ **Take a long, deep breath** through the nose, hold the breath for a few seconds and then exhale through the mouth until the lungs are empty. **Repeat** for at least three cycles.
- ✿ As you take these deep breaths, consciously **relax the body**, dropping the shoulders away from the ears.
- ✿ **Resume normal breathing.**
- ✿ **Count the next 10 in-breaths**, without rushing or trying to control the breath.

“So what am I actually doing during meditation?”

Here’s the technique in a nutshell: ***Pay attention to your breath until you notice you’ve become distracted; congratulate yourself for noticing the distraction and then gently guide your attention back to the breath; repeat until the timer is up.***

Let’s take the process step-by-step:

- ✿ **Rest your attention on the breath.** You can observe the breath at the nose, in the chest, in the belly, or all three at once. Choose whichever of these options is easiest for you and work with that as your meditation object. Observe the breath as you inhale. Observe the breath as you exhale. Observe the pauses between breaths. You’re not looking for anything unusual here, just observe the normal sensations of breath entering and exiting the body.
- ✿ **Do not suppress your thoughts or emotions**, because doing so will only agitate your mind. Instead, ***let your thoughts and emotions arise as normal, but let them remain in the background*** while your attention rests on the breath.
- ✿ Eventually, ***your attention will forget the breath and begin mind-wandering***, likely distracted by thoughts, emotions, or physical sensations. Pro-tip: that’s okay! In fact, it’s inevitable. When you notice your attention has forgotten the breath, there is no need for frustration or guilt, though this reaction is common.
- ✿ At some point during mind-wandering, you will experience an, “Aha!” moment ***when you realize your attention has forgotten the breath***. Instead of reacting with frustration, ***congratulate yourself for remembering***. Give yourself a moment of pride for successfully catching the mind-wandering.
- ✿ Then gently and patiently ***guide your attention back to the breath***, and continue observing the breath as before.
- ✿ In this manner, ***continue attending to the breath*** while keeping an eye out for those “Aha!” moments. As soon as you notice your attention is mind-wandering, congratulate yourself for noticing and then gently re-direct your attention back to the breath, and ***start again***.
- ✿ **Repeat** this process until the timer is up.

The actual technique of meditation is quite simple, but not necessarily easy. Notice we are *not* trying to stop thinking. We are just noticing when the mind is distracted and continuously

redirecting our attention to the breath. Each time your attention wanders away from the breath and you gently bring it back, ***you are subtly strengthening your control over the mind and carving new neural pathways in your brain.***

“What’s so special about the breath?”

We observe the breath during meditation because ***physical sensations like breathing are the gateway to the present moment.*** The breath is always happening right now, unlike thoughts or emotions which usually dwell on past or future. ***So the simplest way to be present in the current moment is to focus on the physical sensations of the breath.*** Since the breath is always with you, you can take your practice everywhere you go. Meditating on the breath effectively reduces anxiety or depression when deployed in daily life, outside of your regular sitting practice.

“So how does meditation help with my mood?”

Use this simple technique to regulate your mood, even when you’re not sitting in meditation. As anxiety or depression arises throughout your day, ***rest your attention on the breath even while walking, driving, or performing daily tasks.*** Also pause regularly for a mindful moment:

- ✿ ***Stop*** whatever you’re doing.
- ✿ Sit or stand up with a ***straight back.***
- ✿ ***Close your eyes.***
- ✿ Rest your ***attention on the breath.***
- ✿ ***Take three, long, deep breaths,*** inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth.

Often, simply paying attention to the breath is enough to dispel any anxiety or depression. Remember that the breath and the mind are connected. When the mind is agitated, the breath speeds up and shortens. When the mind is calm, the breath slows down and lengthens. Therefore, you can control the mind by controlling the breath.

When you feel anxiety or depression arising, ***deliberately lengthening and deepening the breath will trigger a sense of calm.*** In this manner, you can combat negative thoughts and emotions at any time and place.

“Can meditation help me sleep?”

Yes; you can use mindfulness meditation to sleep better. Just lie flat on your back with your eyes closed, and take three long, deep breaths while relaxing the whole body. Then focus your attention softly on the breath. Don’t worry about when sleep will come, just know that your body is already resting in this position. Drowsiness will eventually arise and you can simply surrender to it when it comes.

*“But how do I establish a **consistent** daily practice?”*

- ✿ **Meditate at the same time each day**, as a set schedule makes it much easier.
- ✿ **Remind yourself why** you want to practice, whether it's for happiness, better performance at work, or spiritual advancement.
- ✿ When you feel resistance to meditating for your usual duration, **practice for a shorter duration rather than skipping the session altogether.**
- ✿ Start with a number of days per week that feels comfortable, and then **gradually increase** the number of days per week as you feel ready for the next challenge.
- ✿ **Be patient** with yourself and approach the practice joyfully. Take it one day at a time and avoid making arbitrary deadlines for yourself.

“How can I measure my progress?”

You can measure your progress over time by noting how much of each meditation session is spent with the breath as opposed to mind-wandering. With practice, you will notice that time spent mind-wandering gradually decreases and time spent actually observing the breath increases. As the balance tips in the favor of the meditation object and away from mind-wandering, thoughts and emotions naturally fade out of awareness altogether, replaced by an abiding calm, tranquility and clarity of mind.

“How can I meditate for longer durations?”

Eventually, you will want to extend the time of each meditation session. 10 to 20 minutes is suitable for beginners, especially before a consistent daily practice is established. Once a daily practice is routine, then gradually extend the duration of each session. Only extend by a few minutes, and once that additional time feels comfortably routine, only then should you extend another few minutes. In this manner, you can gradually extend the duration of your meditation sessions until you are sitting comfortably for 45 minutes to an hour.

You may take months or even years to reach that level of practice, and that's okay. How fast you advance is not important, **what matters is that you are enjoying your practice in a comfortable manner.** You cannot make a flower bloom faster by force, only with love and patience.

“How hard should I work to advance my practice?”

Your meditation practice should not be one of extreme exertion, or else you will end up dreading your sessions. Do not let meditation become just another chore you feel obligated to do. **Remember that meditation is your chance to enjoy some quiet solitude and to disengage from the stresses and rigors of daily life.** Through a daily meditation practice, you can cultivate the ability to dwell constantly in tranquility and peace whenever and wherever you are, regardless of what's happening outside of you.

*“Feelings come and go like clouds in a windy sky.
Conscious breathing is my anchor.”
- Thich Nhat Hanh*

*“Meditation is the discovery that the point of life is always arrived at in the immediate moment.”
- Alan Watts*

*“If you want to conquer the anxiety of life,
live in the moment, live in the breath.”
- Amit Ray*

*“‘Getting away from it all,’ many people want that,
and of course ultimately the only way to get away from it all is to go within, now.”
- Eckhart Tolle*

*“The way to do is to be.”
- Lao Tzu*

*“You should sit in meditation for 20 minutes every day—unless you’re too busy.
Then you should sit for an hour.”
- Zen proverb*