

Meditation – Best Practices for Success

Thank you so much for taking part in our recent meditation workshop. Here are some tips and tricks to help you get started on your meditation journey. Meditation has tremendous health benefits which you will experience almost immediately, but it can also be quite frustrating. If you follow these guidelines it will help you avoid many of the pitfalls that make people quit their practice before they even get started.

Minimize External Distractions

It's impossible to remove all the disturbances from your environment completely, but choosing a calm location away from as many transient distractions will start you off on the right foot.

Our nervous system is wired to notice changes in our environment, sudden sounds, sudden flashes of light, changes in temperature etc. These are transient events. The constant sound of an air conditioner is fine, your mind will lose interest in it, but the occasional, sporadic sound of a cuckoo clock will grab your attention and break your concentration.

So choose a room that is;

- As quiet and as calm as possible
- Free from strong smells especially food that might make you hungry**
- Avoid changing lights, blinking LEDs, disco lights or flashes of light from cars or trees outside
- A comfortable temperature – not too hot, not too cold

If you live in a busy household, let everyone know that you're meditating and ask them to politely keep noise to a minimum. If you can hear talking in a nearby room or a TV that's on nearby, your mind will be curious about the conversations and won't fully relax.

** The exception to this is burning incense. This can be a powerful tool to program your mind. If you use it consistently, your mind will associate the smell with meditation and will actually help you get into a meditative state much more easily.

Eliminate Internal Distractions

Now that we minimized our external distractions, we now have to turn our attention to internal distractions.

Make sure;

- You're not hungry – your stomach will growl and your mind will not relax
- You're not full – if you ate a big meal, your stomach will be busy and your mind will not relax

- Your clothing isn't too tight. The more you relax, any tight clothing will suddenly become very noticeable. This includes jewelry and watches.

Posture is Vitrally Important

How you sit for meditation is vital. Traditional methods call for sitting on the floor with your legs crossed in lotus position. This is ideal because it puts the base of your spine in contact with the earth, the top of your head pointing to the sky and your spine perfectly stacked. But this is generally only good if you've been sitting like that your whole life. If your posture is uncomfortable, your body will not relax and your mind won't relax. You'll be focused on the discomfort instead.

You should be comfortable without any pressure points, but not so comfortable that you fall asleep. So, I recommend a typical dining room chair. But don't lean against the backrest. Sit forward instead. If you're tall, add cushions to the seat to raise you to the point where your pelvis tips forward and your spine becomes tall, straight and neutral like a balanced stack of pebbles. Keep adding cushions until you feel that release point. Similarly, if you are shorter, add cushions under your feet to raise your knees slightly.

Then place your hands gently in your lap. You can do palms down resting on your thighs or palms up, overlapped like you're holding a basketball against your stomach.

If you're not able to comfortably sit in a dining room chair, then a couch or recliner is the next option. Failing that, you can also meditate laying on the floor or in bed, but it will be harder to not fall asleep.

Relaxation is Key

Many people skip over this step, but this is so important for a successful meditation. If you don't take the time to fully relax your body and release all the tension, then your mind will be distracted by the aches and pains in your body or pressure points from incorrect posture.

Work your way through your entire body, starting with your feet and relax each muscle as you get to it. Picture them melting like butter in the sun and allow the tension to dissolve.

Adjust your posture as needed. Reposition legs. Sit tall and make sure your head is balanced perfectly on top of your spine. Keep adjusting and relaxing until you are sure you're in a completely neutral state.

Pay particular attention to;

- Shoulders / upper back – we carry a lot of tension here, imagine a warm bean bag resting and pressing down on your shoulders. The heat dissolving the tension and releasing the muscles.
- Head – give it a wiggle to make sure it's balanced on top of your spine

- Jaw – when we think, our jaw tenses up, so keep your mouth gently closed but relax your jaw. Give it a wiggle.
- Eyes and forehead – make sure you're not squinting or frowning

Once you've relaxed your body, revisit to make sure nothing tensed up and just relax some more. There is no limit to how much you should relax. Even if this is all you do in your meditation, you are removing stress from your body, allowing toxins to be processed, reducing blood pressure and improving your circulation and calming your nervous system. You already did an amazing thing for your health.

Relaxing your body like this sends a clear signal to your mind that you feel safe. That you are not in any danger. So now your mind can relax. It doesn't have to worry.

Follow the Breath

There are many different forms of meditation, but here we'll describe the most simple form of following the breath.

Now that you have reduced external distraction and your body is stationary and relaxed, your mind will effectively lose awareness of your body and your surroundings. So we need to give our mind something to focus on. An anchor. The simplest thing is our breathing. Breathing happens whether you're thinking about it and controlling it or whether we're not paying it any attention. So breathing will always be there as a constant but gentle reminder of what we're doing.

We cannot turn off the thoughts in our head like flipping a light switch, the only thing we can do is regain control of our awareness. What we are doing with this meditation is noticing when our focus switches from our breathing to a thought in our head. As soon as we notice, we grab that focus and gently bring it right back to our breathing.

So you're not controlling your mind or your thoughts, you're just grabbing the awareness and pointing it at the thing YOU want it to focus on. If you're persistent, your mind will eventually get tired of the game and will go to sleep.

Technique;

There are a few places to notice the breath.

1. feel the air moving through your nose (great on cold days)
2. restrict your throat slightly and feel the air catch (good any time)
3. feel your lungs gently rising and falling (very gentle, floaty)
4. feel your stomach moving (only good if you belly breath using your diaphragm)

Choose whichever place you can notice the air moving more easily and just watch the breath. Notice how relaxed and gentle your breathing becomes. Get fascinate with all the tiny sensations you experience while breathing. Study it like your life depends on it. Each breath is different.

Pay particular attention to the top of the breath. Notice that transition between breathing in and breathing out. There is a slight pause where there's no movement at all. It's like time itself stands still. This is your gateway into the more mystery of the universe.

But the real trick, and the skill that takes time, is to notice when you stopped following the breath and got distracted by the mind. When you're no longer meditating but you're off shopping in your head or arguing with a virtual coworker. As soon as you notice, just gently go back to following the breath.

Just keep redirecting your focus. Become obsessive. Take back control from your mind. But be kind to yourself. Don't get upset and start another conversation about how bad you are at meditating, just gently bring yourself back to your breathing.

And that's it, now you're meditating. You are relaxed. You feel safe. Your mind is at peace.

Repetition and Consistency

Meditation is a process. It's a skill that takes effort to master, but you will very quickly reap the health benefits associated with calming your nervous system like this. So I highly encourage you to start practicing.

Ideally you should practice;

- 20 minutes, twice a day, morning and evening**
- same time / same location - for consistency, your mind responds to the repetition
- set a gentle (low volume) timer so your mind doesn't wonder when your time is up***

** Morning is a great way to start the day in control. Evening is good at removing stress from the day so you can sleep better. If you can only do one, I'd recommend the evening. If 20 minutes is too long, start with 5 or 10 minutes to build the habit. And if that's too long, then even one minute is better than none. "I'm so busy, I don't have time" – meditation is so restorative to our bodies that once you start, you'll find you don't need as much sleep. Wake up 10 minutes earlier than normal and meditate. Find a way to fit it in your schedule.

*** Gentle alarm – use your phone, but set the volume really low. When you enter a deep state of relaxation, any sudden noises can be very jarring. A timer isn't necessary, some people meditate for hours if they have nothing going on, but you'll notice that time passes differently when meditating. Sometimes it can feel like hours have passed when you've only closed your eyes for a few minutes or vice versa. But at some point, your mind will start to wonder if your time is up and you'll constantly be distracted by the curiosity.

Ignore the Frustration

Many people quit meditating because their mind keeps jumping in. They think they're bad at it or that it's simply not working for them and so they simply quit. But ironically, the very thing you're trying to silence is the thing that convinces you you're not good at meditating. It feels like your mind fights back.

This is fairly normal. But it's also a sign that you're making progress. Ignore that frustration and ignore the urge to quit. Just keep going and simply return to following the breath.

Be persistent and you will regain control of your awareness.

You are Amazing

Congratulations for starting on this journey. It's one of the biggest self improvement steps you can take. It's not easy and it can take some time. But the human being you will become once your mind steps aside and stops criticizing and complaining about things, you will become unstoppable.

No inner monologue telling you you're not good at something. Nothing telling you that someone is better than you or that you're better than them. No defensiveness. No drama. No missing out on the present moment because you're lost in a story in your head. But instead, filled with peace and joy. In awe at everything the world has to offer.

If you have any questions, you can reach out to me directly – **mat@TheGregariousHermit.com** or visit my website **www.TheGregariousHermit.com**

You can also listen to my podcast, "Infinite Bliss" which is available on Spotify and Youtube as well as all major podcast platforms.

And finally, you can support my efforts through **BuyMeACoffee.com/TheGregariousHermit** or by checking out my book, "Understanding Happiness ~ pocket companion workbook", available on Amazon.

Thank you so much. It's an absolute pleasure for me to be able to share my knowledge and hopefully it helps you on your own journey.