

# Mindfulness

As a form of mental training, mindfulness meditation has been practiced for over two millennia. Originating in Asian Buddhist traditions, the practice is said to involve the cultivation of experiential awareness of the present moment (**Brown, 2003; Analayo, 2004**). This present-moment focus is thought to improve well-being by allowing individuals to become aware of sensations, emotions and thoughts that arise in the mind without judgment or reactivity (**Baer, 2003; Bishop, 2004**). Over the last two decades, mindfulness-related treatments have become an increasingly common component of the healthcare system in developed countries through therapies such as dialectical behaviour therapy (**Linehan, 1993**), acceptance and behaviour therapy (**Hayes et al., 1999**), mindfulness based cognitive therapy (MBCT) (**Teasdale et al., 2000a,b**) and mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR) (**Kabat-Zinn, 1990**).

# What is the best type of meditation?

Types

How long does it take?

How often to meditate

Tips

Takeaway

Meditation offers time for relaxation and heightened awareness in a stressful world where our senses are often dulled. Research suggests that meditation has the potential for more than just temporary stress relief.

Educators, spiritual leaders, and [mental health](#) experts have developed dozens of forms of meditation. The variety suggests there is a form of meditation to suit most people, regardless of personality or lifestyle. For someone who meditates, the practice offers a chance to improve physical wellbeing, as well as emotional health. However, there is no “right way” to

meditate, meaning people can explore the different types until they find one that works for them.

## Fast facts on types of meditation:

- Within each type of meditation, there are several subtypes to discover and practice.
- Meditation teachers have different ideas about how frequently a person should meditate.
- It is fine to blend types or to test different approaches until the right one is found.

## Types of meditation

The following seven examples are some of the best-known ways to meditate:

### 1. Loving-kindness meditation



With the many types of meditation to try, there should be one to suit most individuals.

Loving-kindness meditation is also known as **Metta meditation**. Its goal is to cultivate an attitude of love and kindness toward everything, even a person's enemies and sources of **stress**.

While breathing deeply, practitioners open their minds to receiving loving kindness. They then send messages of loving kindness to the world, to specific people, or to their loved ones.

In most forms of this meditation, the key is to repeat the message many times, until the practitioner feels an attitude of loving kindness.

Loving-kindness meditation is designed to promote **feelings of compassion and love**, both for others and oneself.

It can help those affected by:

- anger
- frustration
- resentment
- interpersonal conflict

This type of meditation may increase positive emotions and has been linked to reduced **depression, anxiety,** and post-traumatic stress or **PTSD**.

## 2. Body scan or progressive relaxation

Progressive relaxation, sometimes called body scan meditation, is meditation that encourages people to scan their bodies for areas of tension. The goal is to notice tension and to allow it to release.

During a progressive relaxation session, practitioners start at one end of their body, usually their feet, and work through the whole.

Some forms of progressive relaxation require people to tense and then relax muscles. Others encourage a person to visualise a wave, drifting over their body to release tension.

Progressive relaxation can help to promote generalised feelings of calmness and relaxation. It may [also help with chronic pain](#). Because it slowly and steadily relaxes the body, some people use this form of meditation to help them sleep.

### 3. Mindfulness meditation

Mindfulness is a form of meditation that [urges practitioners to remain aware and present](#) in the moment.

Rather than dwelling on the past or dreading the future, mindfulness encourages awareness of a person's existing surroundings. Crucial to this is a lack of judgment. So, rather than reflecting on the annoyance of a long wait, a practitioner will simply note the wait without judgment.

Mindfulness meditation is something people can do almost anywhere. While waiting in line at the grocery store, for example, a person might calmly notice their surroundings, including the sights, sounds, and smells they experience.

A form of mindfulness is involved in most kinds of meditation. Breath awareness encourages practitioners to be aware of their breathing, while progressive relaxation draws attention to areas of tension in the body.

Because mindfulness is a theme common to many forms of meditation, it has been extensively studied.

[Research has found](#) that mindfulness can:

- reduce fixation on negative emotions
- improve focus
- improve memory
- lessen impulsive, emotional reactions
- improve relationship satisfaction

Some evidence suggests mindfulness may improve health. [For example](#), a study of African-American men with [chronic kidney disease](#) found that mindfulness meditation could lower [blood pressure](#).

## 4. Breath awareness meditation

Breath awareness is a type of mindful meditation that encourages mindful breathing.

Practitioners breathe slowly and deeply, counting their breaths or otherwise focusing on their breaths. The goal is to [focus only on breathing](#) and to ignore other thoughts that enter the mind.

As a form of mindfulness meditation, breath awareness offers many of the same benefits as mindfulness. Those include reduced anxiety, improved concentration, and greater emotional flexibility.

## 5. Kundalini yoga

[Kundalini yoga](#) is a physically active form of meditation that blends movements with deep breathing and mantras. People usually learn from a teacher or do a class. However, someone can learn the poses and mantras at home.

[Similarly to other forms of yoga](#), kundalini [yoga](#) can improve physical strength and reduce pain. It may also improve mental health by reducing anxiety and depression.

A 2008 study of veterans with chronic low-back pain, for

instance, found that yoga reduced pain, increased energy, and improved overall mental health.

## 6. Zen meditation

Zen meditation, sometimes called Zazen is a form of meditation that can be part of Buddhist practice. Many Zen practitioners study under a teacher because this kind of meditation involves specific steps and postures. The goal is to find a comfortable position, focus on breathing, and mindfully observe one's thoughts without judgment.

Again, this form of meditation is similar to mindfulness meditation but requires more discipline and practice. People may prefer it if they are seeking both relaxation and a new spiritual path.

## 7. Transcendental Meditation

Transcendental Meditation is a spiritual form of meditation where practitioners remain seated and breathe slowly. The goal is to transcend or rise above the person's current state of being.

During a meditation session, practitioners focus on a mantra or a repeated word or series of words. A teacher determines the mantra based on a complex set of factors, sometimes including the year the practitioner was born, and the year the teacher was trained.

An alternative allows people to choose their mantra. This more contemporary version is not technically Transcendental Meditation, though it may look substantially similar. A practitioner might decide to repeat "I am not afraid of public speaking" while meditating.

People who practice Transcendental Meditation report

both spiritual experiences and heightened mindfulness.

## How long does it take to work?

The various meditative disciplines encourage a focus on heightened awareness, slower breathing, and increased acceptance.

Meditation is not a results-focused undertaking. Indeed, fixating too much on the results can provoke anxiety that undermines the benefits of meditation.

However, most research shows that meditation can work very quickly. Studies of meditation typically follow practitioners for weeks or months, not years. Many meditation practitioners report an immediate improvement following a meditation session.

During meditation, it is common to feel less stressed, more accepting, and at greater peace. Over time and with practice, these sensations may continue outside of meditation sessions.





# How often to meditate

Choosing to meditate at the same time each day will help make meditating become a daily habit.

There is no right answer to this question. One argument is that any meditation is better than no meditation. So, if a person is only able to meditate once a week, this should not be a barrier to trying out the therapy.

A person can consider starting with a few sessions per week, working up to one session per day.

Meditating around the same time each day can make meditation a habit that is easy to incorporate into daily life.

If meditation is helpful, it may be beneficial to increase the frequency to twice or more per day or to use it to reduce stress whenever needed.

# Tips for better meditation

Those new to meditation may find it beneficial to enrol in a meditation class.

Meditation is a process-oriented undertaking that focuses on the moment, not on the results.

So enjoying the moment is key to successful meditation.

An individual should not judge whether the meditation session is good or bad, right or wrong. Instead, they

should simply remain in that moment.

Meditation is a skill that takes time to master. Some people feel frustrated and even angry when they first attempt to meditate.

Remaining present in the current moment can be challenging, as can focusing on a single mantra without getting distracted.

Whatever their immediate reaction, a person should persist with their meditation practice. Key is to accept the thoughts that appear without judgment or anger. Some novices may benefit from enrolling in a class or having the support of a teacher.

## Takeaway

Meditation is a simple strategy that can help obtain better health and a happier life. It takes time to master, as does any other skill. If a person sticks with it and is willing to experiment with the different methods, they are more likely to discover a meditation style that suits them.

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