

Instructions for Mindfulness Meditation

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Meditation helps us relax and reduce stress. It makes it easier to stay in the present moment. And in doing so, it becomes easier and more natural, to bring balance, calm and a sense of centeredness to our daily activities. Meditation helps us to be with the difficulties that arise without being swept away or overwhelmed by them, and generally to be more focused.

Some people find the idea of meditation esoteric or intimidating. But it's really not. It's actually very simple. There are hundreds of ways to meditate. But here we're talking about mindfulness meditation.

The mind wanders. To stay in the present moment, the mind needs something to focus on – something constant. In mindfulness practice, we start by focusing on the breath. There's nothing more constant than breathing in and breathing out.

So, to start find a comfortable place to sit with your back straight and both feet on the floor. Let your back fall into its natural curve – not so straight that it's like you're standing at attention. Let your hands rest in your lap or on your knees or thighs. Gently close your eyes and bring your attention to your breathing. Begin by taking a few deep breaths to help you get focused, then breathe naturally and continue to focus on your breath. There's a couple of ways you can do this: You can focus on the sensation of your breath moving between your nose and your upper lip. Or you can focus on your chest or belly moving up and down as you breathe.

Your mind will wander away almost immediately. When you notice that you've wandered off, gently, but firmly bring your attention back to your breathing. I emphasize gentleness here. Don't get frustrated or start getting hard on yourself. An important part of this practice is learning to be kind and gentle with yourself. It's not unlike training a puppy to heel. You're walking your new puppy. It tries to wander away. You gently, but firmly, pull it back to your side. And you continue to love your puppy.

You may be lost in thought for a long time before you even notice it. That's ok. When you notice your puppy mind has wandered off, just bring it back.

You can't do this wrong. The doing it is the doing it.

Try this for ten to fifteen minutes every day. The effects are cumulative. You'll start to feel more relaxed and centered day to day. The things that bother you won't bother you as much. The sources of stress and anxiety may not go away. But they'll be more manageable.