

LEARN TO MEDITATE

with Stacy Matthews, Esq., NTC



MINDFULNESS

The positive effects of a dedicated meditation practice hold the power to deeply impact your quality of life. The simple act of presence and awareness that meditation reinforces helps you release the past. It also releases the limiting scripts you play over in your mind every day. Learning to be mindfully present in your life allows you to let go of what is not serving you (like anger, frustration and impatience) and fill your life with what will serve you (like peace, patience and compassion).

First, let's debunk the myth that meditation means you sit with your legs crossed and you repeat a mantra for 30 minutes. Meditation comes in many forms from the classic seated lotus position to walking meditations to primordial sound meditations to guided meditations. And none of them are better than any other. There are millions of people on this planet therefore there are millions of types of meditation. Don't let anyone try to tell you that you're not meditating properly.

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Practical advice and tangible steps to incorporate a meditation practice into your life.

PRACTICE

A meditation practice is like any other healthy lifestyle choice. If your goal is to lose weight, sleep better, control your temper or maintain wellness, you must become MINDFUL of what you put into your body, the chemicals you expose yourself to, how much you sleep, how much time you dedicate to exercise and cooking healthy meals, etc.

Meditation increases mindfulness and, unlike food choices, **THERE IS NO WRONG OR RIGHT WAY TO MEDITATE**. Let me say that again, there is no wrong or right way to meditate. You just have to do it, even if it feels like you're doing it wrong.

There are only three things that can happen when you meditate. You can fall asleep, have thoughts or drift into stillness which is also known as slipping into the gap. The gap is simply the space between your thoughts. So, if **ANY** one of these things happens, then guess what? You're a frickin rockstar!

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There's not a perfect way to meditate. Find what works for you.

BENEFITS

The **physical** benefits you reap when you meditate are astounding. You may: lower blood pressure and heart rate; lower cortisol levels which are associated with stress and weight gain; improve the immune system; improve memory by literally increasing gray matter; increase mental clarity; and decrease anxiety and depression.

The **psychological** benefits are also pretty nifty. Meditating allows you to live with more awareness, to actually notice the stuff that's going on around you. You become more reflective and act with less reactivity. You become less impulsive because you make more conscious choices. Meditation elevates you to live a life with more compassion and forgiveness and with less judgment.

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We have 60,000 to 80,000 thoughts a day. It's perfectly normal to think while you're meditating.

SQUIRREL BRAIN

I was trained in transcendental meditation almost 25 years ago when I was in college. For many years I was what was known as a crisis meditator. I would meditate before an exam or while I was at the dentist or for the bar exam but I didn't do it everyday. I knew the benefits and how it would be helpful but for some reason trying to find 20 to 30 minutes a day never made my 'list.'

Plus, I had too many thoughts! I found it hard trying to deal with all of those thoughts in my head and I would get frustrated because the hamster wheel wouldn't stop spinning. But here's the thing, we have between 60,000 and 80,000 thoughts a day so it's damn near impossible to stop thinking. The goal of meditation isn't to STOP THINKING, it's to find the space between the thoughts. Because it's in that space that we find and cultivate stillness and silence. Let me give you permission right now that it's okay to have thoughts while you meditate.

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Your step-by-step
guide to
meditating.

Tips for a Successful Meditation Practice:

BE CONSISTENT

Pick a regular time that you can commit to every day. Make it a recurring appointment on your calendar and please don't fool yourself into thinking that you don't have time. If someone were to offer you \$5 million dollars to meditate every day for a year, you would do it! And just so we're clear, the rewards you reap from a dedicated practice are even greater than \$5 million dollars.

START SMALL

Set the timer on your phone for 5 minutes and then build up to 20 or 30. When the timer is set then you won't have to open your eyes to check how much time has passed.

COMFORT IS QUEEN

Find a quiet place and get comfortable. I always used to meditate on my bed with a bunch of pillows stacked up behind me. However, I now prefer to meditate on a zafu pillow which raises my bum up off the floor and allows me to sit upright without hurting my back.

CREATE A RITUAL

Light a candle or smell your favorite essential oil. Lavender is known for calming the senses but I prefer peppermint when I meditate. In fact, I always travel with a small vial of peppermint oil so that I can meditate wherever I am, even in the airport or on a plane.

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INTENTIONS MATTER

Set an intention for your meditation practice by asking yourself these questions: “Who am I?” “What do I want?” and “What am I grateful for?” Perhaps you never get any answers to these questions, perhaps you do. Just keep asking the questions without judgment.

THE OBJECT OF YOUR ATTENTION

Choose a mantra and repeat it while you inhale and exhale. In Sanskrit, mantra means ‘mind vehicle.’ It’s just a short phrase with no distinct meaning that helps you keep your mind free of thoughts. A few popular, universal mantras are SO HUM, AHAMBRAMASMI and OM. When you find yourself thinking about things or creating a grocery list or remembering that you forgot to email someone, easily and effortlessly come back to your mantra and gently start repeating it with the movement of your breath inhaling and exhaling.