

## The Benefits of Meditation

Meditation is a mental exercise that involves relaxation, focus, and awareness. Meditation is to the mind what physical exercise is to the body. The practice is usually done individually, in a seated position, with eyes closed. Meditation is frequently recommended as a tool to foster both good mental and physical health. According to the Centers for Disease Control between 2012 to 2017, the number of Americans who reported meditating in the past twelve months increased from 4.1 percent to 14.2 percent. By 2022, 17.1 percent of adults (including 41.1 percent in the 18-24 age group) said they meditated at least once a week. The stress of the COVID pandemic is a contributing factor, but so is the growing awareness of the benefits of meditation and mindfulness.

In a review of over 400 studies, mindfulness meditation was identified as an effective mental health practice for improving physical and psychological well-being. There are benefits to meditation that positively impact many aspects of our lives. These include lowering anxiety and stress levels, supporting better interpersonal relationships, improving focus, and reducing 'brain chatter'. Meditation connects the mind and body allowing increased physical and mental peace and calmness.

Meditation is something everyone can do and is a simpler process than many people think. The following steps make up a meditation experience:

1. Find a place to sit that is quiet and comfortable.
2. Determine the length of time you will meditate. Start with a five - 10 minute session. Use a timer if you wish to be alerted at the end of your session.
3. Get comfortable. You can sit in a chair, loosely cross-legged on the floor or you can kneel. Maintain a stable position for the length of your meditative session.
4. Focus on your breath noticing the inhalation and exhalation.
5. Notice when new thoughts come into your mind and return your attention to your breath. Do not be concerned about these thoughts. It is a normal part of the meditation.
6. As your meditation comes to an end, gently open your eyes and lift your gaze. Focus on how your body feels and what emotions and thoughts you have.

The more you meditate, the more comfortable and effective your practice will be for you. Daily meditation is recommended for optimal benefit. Integrating the following seven elements into your meditation routine can make your meditation deeper, more enjoyable and transformative:

### **Before Meditation**

- \*Relax your body and breath to calm and center yourself.
- \*Focus on things for which you feel gratitude.
- \*Have a strong intention.

### **During Meditation**

- \*Do not be frustrated or feel guilt for distracting thoughts that interrupt your focus.

\*Appreciate moments of concentration.

**After Meditation**

\*Close your meditation slowly and quietly.

\* Record your observations and feelings in your journal.

Meditation is a good way to refocus and center yourself. When life is hectic and complicated, it can be very difficult to concentrate on meditation without assistance. There are a variety of meditation apps available to make your practice easier and more intuitive. These apps give you access to a variety of guided meditation sessions ranging from one to thirty minutes in length. Some of the most well- known apps include Calm, Headspace, Insight Timer, Smiling Mind and Shine.

Meditation has thrived for centuries and continues to play an important role in the lives of people around the world. Scientists have shown us how meditation positively impacts our body and brain, but it is up to us to decide if or when to put it into practice.