

MEDITATION PRACTICE

The word “meditation” has many definitions, but generally refers to practices intended to promote clarity and relaxation. A key attribute of the meditative state includes the ability to observe and be peaceful with thoughts without dwelling, judging, or interpreting them. Meditation practices can include the following:

- **Single point of focus** – the act of directing the thoughts to a single object or concept. This may include body, breath, or a word or statement (mantra).
- **Self-inquiry** – applying self-inquiry statements or questions such as “who am I” or “I am” in order for the practitioner to reconnect to their own immediate experience.
- **Thought labeling** – simply naming any thought that arises as a “thought” allows the meditator to acknowledge that thoughts are not reality and are the product of our minds.
- **Cultivation of intention** – silent repetition of specific words or statements reflecting a desired state such as kindness, compassion, clarity, energy or peace.

Science & meditation

Medical and scientific academic communities are increasingly involved in quantifying the benefits and outcomes yielded by various meditation modalities. Countless studies have identified both behavioral and clinical improvements resulting from meditation practices. These include:

- **Stress reduction.** Many studies show that practicing mindfulness reduces stress. Research concludes that mindfulness-based therapy may be useful in altering affective and cognitive processes that underlie multiple clinical issues. (Hoffman et al. 2010) Source APA.ORG
- **Reduced rumination.** Several studies show that mindfulness reduces rumination. Meditators also have significantly better working memory capacity and are better able to sustain attention during a performance task compared with the control group. (Chambers et al. 2008) Source APA.ORG
- **More cognitive flexibility.** Studies show meditation also provides greater cognitive flexibility. (Siegel, 2007a) and activates the brain region associated with more adaptive responses to stressful or negative situations (Cahn & Polich, 2006; Davidson et al., 2003). Source APA.ORG

Creating a self-practice: recommendations

There are many meditation traditions, each with its own guidelines and structures. Some traditions are very exacting regarding the when/how/what/how long a meditation practice should be. Generally, practitioners across traditions agree upon the following:

- Consistency helps. Choose a time you can pretty much practice every day.
- Start with a modest amount of time – even 5 minutes is better than nothing!
- As you increase in comfort with the practice, you may begin to add time. Some is always better than none.
- Sit in an upright chair that is comfortable but provides enough support.
- Use a rolled towel or small pillow behind your lower back if needed for support.
- Turn your phone OFF.
- Release any time pressure by setting a timer/clock.

Meditation Log

Day	Start	End	Situation	Observations

Resources for Further Exploration

The following are links to organizations representing some of the more prevalent traditions in meditation. As some organizations are affiliated with Buddhism or other ancient spiritual traditions, please use your own discretion and wisdom in ascertaining the right “fit” as you look into continuing your investigation of meditation.

Center for Mindfulness: UMass Medical Center & Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction

<http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/>

Loving-Kindness Meditations: Jack Kornfield

<http://www.jackkornfield.com/2011/02/meditation-on-lovingkindness/>

New York Meditation:

<http://www.newyorkmeditationcenter.com/>

New York Shambhala Center:

<http://ny.shambhala.org/>

David Lynch Foundation for Transcendental Meditation:

www.davidlynchfoundation.org/