

Meditation for Beginners: How to Meditate

Does sitting alone in a quiet room while trying to avoid your own thoughts sound intimidating? Don't panic. Meditation is easier than you think, and the benefits are plenty. Think: More relaxation—and less stress, chronic pain, and risk of depression. Here, we asked experts how to meditate when you're a beginner, so you can snag the practice's perks ASAP.



Leave a Loud Room

There's no *wrong* place to meditate, but choosing a calm place might make it easier when you're first starting out: Your mind will invent enough distractions on its own, so no need to sit somewhere where there are other things going on.



Let There Be Light

If you're prone to sleepiness, especially as a beginner, try meditating in a place with enough natural light to stay alert. As you become better, you may want to change it up. "Whatever feels best is what you should experience," says MaryBeth Skoch, MA, Integrative Behavioral Health Therapist at VeraVia, a new health and wellness resort in San Diego. "But often, dimming the lights and adding soft lighting such as battery-operated candles can be inviting. By adjusting the cues in your environment, you are setting the stage for your mind to 'let go.'"



Check Your Posture

You can position your body for meditation in any number of ways—sitting, lying down, kneeling—but ultimately, you should feel comfortable the whole way through. “Allow your body posture to be at ease, be mindful not to clench your fists or jaw, and uncross your legs and arms when sitting or lying down,” says Skoch. “Feel free to adjust your body, if you need to, so you’re not too focused on holding any one pose.”



Be Consistent

Usually, people find meditation most helpful if they do it early in the morning or just before bed. “This allows you to set the stage for your day or to unwind from it,” Skoch explains, although she says she does have the occasional client who will have a “midday mindful moment” to decompress and refocus on her tasks. When you start out, explore different options to find out what feels most natural to you—just work toward keeping it consistent. Once you’ve found a time that works best for your life, stick with that. “Remember, meditation is like developing a muscle,” Skoch says. “Results take time, so be patient with yourself.”

Accept (Don't Fight) Your Thoughts

Shunning stressful thoughts is usually a beginner's primary concern. "Understand that it is your mind's job to think, and accept that your mind will wander," says Skoch. "You can't stop thinking, you can only redirect your attention." Observe your thoughts and feelings without judging them, and you'll have an easier time keeping cool amid everyday stressors, too.

Focus on Your Breath

"Focus on a body sensation, like your breath coming in and out of your nose, your belly rising and falling," says Ford. When stressful thoughts come up, don't worry. Simply refocus your attention on your body—again and again and again. And if it helps, you can also think of your breath as the central point of your meditation. "Use that as an 'anchor' for your focus," says Skoch. "Embrace meditation as a way to become familiar with how your mind works. Despite being with ourselves all day, we spend very little time getting to know our thoughts and feelings." Remember this is "you" time.

Start Small

As little as three or five minutes is enough. Doing a short amount of time, at the same time, every day, makes a habit—which you can then lengthen to 15, 20, 30 minutes when you're ready.