



# Meditation for Beginners: Tips for Quieting the Mind

AMIT P. CHAUDHARI

Research Scholar,  
H.N.G. University, Patan  
Gujarat (India)

## 1. Introduction

Meditation is the art of focusing 100% of our attention in one area. The practice comes with a myriad of well-publicized health benefits including increased concentration, decreased anxiety, and a general feeling of happiness.

Although a great number of people try meditation at some point in their lives, a small percentage actually sticks with it for the long-term. This is unfortunate, and a possible reason is that many beginners do not begin with a mindset needed to make the practice sustainable. The purpose of this article is to provide 20 practical recommendations to help beginners get past the initial hurdles and integrate meditation over the long term:

## 2. What happens when you meditate?

The Transcendental Meditation technique allows our mind to settle inward beyond thought to experience the source of thought - pure awareness, also known as transcendental consciousness. This is the most silent and peaceful level of consciousness- our innermost Self. In this state of restful alertness, our brain functions with significantly greater coherence and our body gains deep rest. Meditation is an approach to training the mind, similar to the way that fitness is an approach to training the body. But many meditation techniques exist. So how do you learn how to meditate?

“In Buddhist tradition, the word ‘meditation’ is equivalent to a word like ‘sports’ in the U.S. It’s a family of activity, not a single thing,” University of Wisconsin neuroscience lab director Richard J. Davidson, Ph.D., told The New York Times. And different meditative practices require different mental skills.

It’s extremely difficult for a beginner to sit for hours and think of nothing or have an “empty mind.” But in general, the easiest way to begin meditating is by focusing on the breath an example of one of the most common approaches to meditation: concentration.

## 3. Concentration Meditation

A concentrative meditation technique involves focusing on a single point. This could entail watching the breath, repeating a single word or mantra, staring at a candle flame, listening to a repetitive gong or counting beads on a rosary. Since focusing the mind is challenging, a beginner might meditate for only a few minutes and then work up to longer durations. In this form of meditation, you simply refocus our awareness on the chosen object of attention each time you notice our mind wandering. Rather than pursuing random thoughts, you simply let them go. Through this process, our ability to concentrate improves.

#### 4. Mindfulness meditation

Mindfulness meditation technique encourages the practitioner to observe wandering thoughts as they drift through the mind. The intention is not to get involved with the thoughts or to judge them, but simply to be aware of each mental note as it arises. Through mindfulness meditation, you can see how our thoughts and feelings tend to move in particular patterns. Over time, you can become more aware of the human tendency to quickly judge experience as “good” or “bad” (“pleasant” or “unpleasant”). With practice, an inner balance develops. In some schools of meditation, students practice a combination of concentration and mindfulness. Many disciplines call for stillness — to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the teacher.

#### 5. Other Meditation Techniques

There are various other meditation techniques. For example, a daily meditation practice among Buddhist monks focuses directly on the cultivation of compassion. This involves envisioning negative events and recasting them in a positive light by transforming them through compassion. There are also moving meditations techniques, such as tai chi, chi kung and walking meditation.

#### 6. Benefits of Meditation

If relaxation is not the goal of meditation, it is often one result of it. Back in the 1970s, Herbert Benson, MD, a researcher at Harvard University Medical School, coined the term the relaxation response after conducting research on people who practiced transcendental meditation. The relaxation response, in Benson’s words, is “an opposite, involuntary response that causes a reduction in the activity of the sympathetic nervous system.”

Since then, studies on the relaxation response have documented the following short-term benefits to the nervous system:

- lower blood pressure
- improved blood circulation
- lower heart rate
- less perspiration
- slower respiratory rate
- less anxiety
- lower blood cortisol levels
- more feelings of well-being
- less stress
- deeper relaxation

Contemporary researchers are now exploring whether consistent meditation practice yields long-term benefits, and noting positive effects on brain and immune function among meditator. Yet it is worth repeating that the purpose of meditation is not to achieve benefits. To put it as an Eastern philosopher might say, the goal of meditation is no goal. It is simply to be present.

In Buddhist philosophy, the ultimate benefit of meditation is liberation of the mind from attachment to things it cannot control, such as external circumstances or strong internal emotions. The liberated, or “enlightened,” practitioner no longer needlessly follows desires or clings to experiences, but instead maintains a calmness of mind and sense of inner balance.

#### 7. How to meditate: Simple meditation for beginners

This meditation exercise is an excellent introduction to meditation techniques.

1. Sit or lie comfortably. You may even want to invest in a meditation chair.
2. Close our eyes.
3. Make no effort to control the breath; simply breathe naturally.
4. Focus our attention on the breath and on how the body moves with each inhalation and exhalation. Notice the movement of our body as you breathe. Observe our chest, shoulders, rib cage and belly. Make no effort to control our breath; simply focus our attention. If our

mind wanders, simply return our focus back to our breath. Maintain this meditation practice for 2–3 minutes to start, and then try it for longer periods.

### References

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