



Meditation

What is Meditation?

- Relaxation
- Concentration
- Focus
- Calming
- Awareness
- Knowledge

Above are words that describe meditation. Defining meditation goes a little deeper than summing it up in six words that but the act of meditating is far simpler than one might think.

Deeper Definition

“Meditation is turning our attention inward so as to attain a higher state of being”

“Meditation is a means of elevating our lower consciousness to a higher level of consciousness”

An Individual Understanding

For me, meditation is individual. On any given day of the week it brings me something totally different. My practice of meditation will change daily given how I feel at the time, what is happening in my external world, the physical activity I have participated in, my mental state, the weather, what I am thinking. Meditation is subjective to the moment and the individual. Not anyone of us will meditate the same.

Benefits of Meditation

See things and situations clearer. Allows us to pay attention or develop a higher awareness to ourselves and the events happening around us.

Calms the mind, reduces anxiety.

Nurturing the inner self to allow us to attend to the physical being of our body.

Meditation is mind, body, spirit. Yet it is not a religion. It can be included in everyday living. I strongly encourage living a mindful way of life and meditation can assist with doing that.

Disclaimer: Meditation & Yoga should not be a substitute for seeking medical or health advice. It is recommended that you seek advice from a suitably qualified health care provider before attempting any form of meditation or physical activity. The information in this handout is designed as a guide only.



Defining Meditation for Inclusion in life

Meditation can be as simple or as complicated as you want. I look at meditation as providing me with an opportunity to live a mindful life and to be completely in the moment. Having full awareness of yourself and your environment is akin to meditating. You will reap the benefits when you can connect with even a single moment in time.

Meditation teaches the benefits of having a mindful life. Meditation is just the beginning for those of you wish to embrace every moment of your life. Just 5 – 10 minutes of stopping, breathing and being completely in those moments is meditating.

We become so disconnected with living that we let each moment pass us by with little thought to our actions. Meditation brings us back to the grassroots of ourselves.

A similar practice but different

The tools used will vary, the outcomes will be different depending on circumstances but overall the practice is the same.

When to meditate?

I choose to meditate for my own personal practice in the morning. I remember reading somewhere that morning time is the best time of the day for yoga and meditation practice.

Honestly I couldn't tell you why the people who wrote that believed it was. However for me – morning practice is great. Simply because I can roll out of bed, get dressed, do my physical exercise, meditate and then finish my other morning rituals before heading to my place of employment.

At the end of the day I know I am less likely to have this wonderful practice.

Even though I know it is good for me to exercise and meditate, after a full day's work I generally want to curl up on the couch, read a good book, sit with my family or roll back into bed. My energy levels are low and the last thing I want to do is be active. Morning practice works in my house because I have become attuned to my body and I know what is right for me.

Choosing the time of the day to meditate is as individual as the practice itself. It will be up to you to experiment with when to practice. Developing your practice will come with time and yep you guessed it - with practice.

Tools of Meditation

Posture

Be comfortable, in a relaxed position. Sitting, lying down, in a chair, using a meditation stool

Highly recommend finding a position where you can have good body alignment (good posture).

In our day to day routine it can be easy to forget having good posture. Sitting at a computer over the course of the day we start to slouch, our head drops forward stretching the muscles of the neck, causing shoulder and neck pain. Our muscles of the spine contract in places causing hip problems, sciatica and muscular aches and pains.



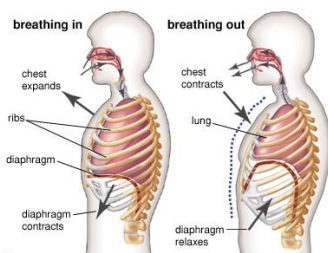
Even walking around we can develop unhealthy postural habits. Check the soles of your shoes – this will give you an indication of how you walk. If the soles of your shoes are scuffed at the heel you are likely placing unnecessary pressure up the back of legs and causing a jolting action through your spine and neck to the top of head. The weight of our body when we stand or walk should be through the centre of our body. It's almost as though we walk on the balls of our feet, yet the weight is distributed in such a way that we use the largest muscles of our body – our quads to allow us to glide. Our head should not 'bounce' but rather move in a straight motion with our legs acting like suspension springs to take the weight of our body. Chin should be parallel to the ground and the head lifted from the crown.

Breathing

Pranayama literally means extension of the life force. Without breath we cannot live. In fact there is an ancient saying that we are born with a finite number of breathes and when we use them we die. So the secret to a long life is to breathe slow and deep.

There are some practitioners that say pranayama or breathing exercises should only be practiced with a qualified instructor. However when we are born we are not taught to breathe. Watching a new born baby breathe you will note how the abdomen moves in and out with little effort. The child breathes through the nose. It is over time that we forget to use our full lung capacity and start to develop techniques that see us only using about 1/3 of our lungs to breathe.

With practice we can re-train ourselves. Explore the process of breathing for yourself. Inhale - exhale. Understand the mechanical parts of the body involved with breathing. When you inhale, the rib cage expands, the diaphragm moves downwards – flattening out, the lungs expand and air is



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drawn in through the nose (or mouth), moves down the trachea into the bronchi and the exchange of oxygen and Carbon dioxide occurs in the alveoli. When you exhale, air is moved out of the lungs by the diaphragm moving upwards or relaxes back into the lung space. The rib cage contracts during exhalation.

This entire process is brought entirely on by a play in muscle contraction and relaxation and a natural response to restore equilibrium to the body. Pressure in the alveoli naturally functions to be in balance with atmospheric pressure – the air in the environment.

Breathing is normally done unconsciously controlled by specialised centres within the brain. Functions within the body often send signals to our brain that unconsciously control the depth and rate of breath we take. For example when we exercise – changes in carbon dioxide in the cells of the body will send a message to the brain causing us to increase our respiration. Stress and anxiety can also cause physiological changes to our body which impacts on the way we breathe.

Learning to become conscious of our breath and then using breathing exercises we can help ourselves relax with real positive outcomes for our wellbeing.

Conscious breathing techniques used in meditation include abdominal breathing, alternate nostril breathing, Ujjayi breathing, Kriya, Ki Breathing exercise and bellows breathing. While technique can



be important and easily learned I think the most important step in breathing for meditation is just being aware of the breathe and training yourself to take slow deep full breathes.

Physical Activity

Science has proven that regular physical activity promotes good health and promotes many social benefits. Physical activity can reduce disease and improve our mental wellbeing. Government agencies recommend at least 30 minutes of daily moderate physical activity outside of our day-to-day routine. It is a totally individual decision as to whether we participate in exercise or not however prior to meditating I recommend undertaking some form of movement to assist in stimulating blood flow and most importantly to connect with your physical being. Majority of the time our mind and body are disconnected and we physically function without any conscious thought. Physical activity can help to bring mind and body closer together functioning as one being.

Physical activity you might like to explore for yourself include:

- Yoga / Pilates
- Walking
- Exercise of any sort

It is important that you speak to your medical or health care practitioner before undertaking any physical activity. Always listen to your body and be kind and respectful to yourself.

Gentle exercise prior to meditation will allow you focus on your breathing. Use each movement to signal either an inhalation or exhalation. Some gentle stretching or yoga like activity you could do before any meditation include:

- Reaching to the sky and then touching your toes (ensure you keep good postural alignment)
- Surayasana (basic salute to the sun exercise)
- Side stretches (left and right side)

Repeat about 5 times

You might like to investigate the 5 Tibetan rites as an easy addition to your daily routine.

Focus

Focusing techniques include breathing and use of mantras or chants. Other focusing tools include mala beads (prayer beads), similar to rosary.

Tools such as mala beads and mantras help to keep our mind from wandering.



Mala Beads

Acts like an anchor for the mind. Moving each mala bead with the rhythm of the breath provides a perfect focus and prevents the mind from being distracted by fleeting thoughts.

There are often 108 string of beads in a mala necklace. (Bracelets will often have 27 – another traditionally auspicious number) A mala bead necklace (and bracelet) will have a master bead (sumeru, guru bead) often used as the starting and end point for you meditation. In some practices the master bead is never passed over. Therefore if you wish do continue with your meditation after 1 round, the mala is turned around to proceed again in the reverse direction. In other practices skipping over the master bead is accepted.

The master bead is thought to represent the higher consciousness or inner self.

Why 108 Beads?

Many reasons for their being 108 beads on a mala necklace, some spiritual significance, others mathematical and even scientific. There are plenty of theories abounding. A couple of my favourites:

- **Heart Chakra:** The chakras are the intersections of energy lines, and there are said to be a total of 108 energy lines converging to form the heart chakra. One of them, sushumna leads to the crown chakra, and is said to be the path to Self-realization.
- **Pranayama:** If one is able to be so calm in meditation as to have only 108 breaths in a day, enlightenment will come.
- **Pentagon:** The angle formed by two adjacent lines in a pentagon equals 108 degrees
- **Sanskrit alphabet:** There are 54 letters in the Sanskrit alphabet. Each has masculine and feminine, shiva and shakti. 54 times 2 is 108.
- **First man in space:** The first manned space flight lasted 108 minutes, and was on April 12, 1961 by Yuri Gagarin, a Soviet cosmonaut.

I have also read that to complete a whole cycle of a mala necklace is to finish at 100 but the necklace holds 108 to allow for 8 errors or distractions. I particularly like this because it reminds me I am human and subject to failures at some point in my life however I am still able to proceed without punishment or judgement of those failings.

Mantra and Chanting

There are many different reasons for using mantras or chants some ranging from spiritual, to cultural and possibly some bordering on religious. However I like to use mantra to focus my thoughts. I find picking a mantra and using each word to direct my breath. In some cases just singing the words can make me feel psychologically better while other times I actually ponder the meaning behind it.

The use of mantras and chanting is as individual as meditating itself. Find something that works for you. Explore it for yourself.



My favourite mantras & chants:

- Om mani padme hum (I am a jewel lotus flower)
- So hum (I am all that)
- OM (believed to be the Universal sound)
- Sa – Ta – Na – Ma (Birth – Life – Death – Rebirth)
- Om Shanti Shanti Shanti (Peace to you, peace to others, peace to the universe)

The environment

Meditation can be practiced anywhere at any time. At first it may be necessary for you to have a routine where you pick a favourite spot that is quiet and dark and you practice at the same time every day. However don't limit yourself; meditation does not have to be about candles, incense or music. What is more important is for you to establish what is right for you.

When you are embarking on your meditation journey it may be necessary to discuss it with family and close friends. They may not understand why you need to do it or even understand what it is you are doing but keep them informed and ask them to respect that this is your time and you need some peace and quiet to develop your practice.

It may be necessary at first to take the phone off the hook, turn the television off, keep your mobile on silent and lock the animals out of your space. Remove anything that may distract you. Over time you might find that you can clearly focus while all that noise and distraction is going on around you. In fact you might even be able to learn to use it as a point of focus.

Ever been in a space with heaps of noise and tried to locate or pin point just one noise. That exercise in itself could be considered a form of meditation.

Recordings / CD's / Podcasts

There are plenty of meditations available on CD or podcast. The use of recorded music can assist with relaxation for some people. Certain types of music are known to relax the mind. Brainwave technology has explored the use of music to slow brain wave frequency which results in altered states of awareness. Common uses for brainwave patterning are improving cognitive function and enhance learning. When the brain is in theta the body enters a state of complete relaxation and higher consciousness.

Other recordings include guided visualisations and meditations.

You may like to explore of these for yourself. I can recommend several that I find beneficial for me, these include:

- Primus Meditation Technique
- Classical Mozart
- Shinkondo – Way of Mind & Spirit
- Music and Mantras by Snatam Kaur
- Music by Scared Earth
- Music by Terry Oldfield



Mandalas

Art work or physical objects can be used as a tool to focus the mind.

A mandala is a circular object or shape that represents wholeness or oneness. A Mandala reminds us of the cosmic unified structure of life. Mandalas can be found everywhere – from nature (the moon and sun, flowers, spider webs, the shape of our galaxy), to architecture (Mosques, cathedrals, labyrinth designs), to symbolic representations in art (Hindu and Tibetan art) and cultural representation.

Centre of the mandala is held at eye height about two feet away from you.

The object is to gaze at your mandala exploring the different parts moving from the outer edge inwards. When you reach the centre, close your eyes and visualise the mandala. Look for an inner connection between yourself and the mandala. Feel the energy travel between yourself and the mandala going deep within your inner core.



Types of Meditation

There are many different forms of meditation. It is about discovering a style that suits you and exploring what it means for you as an individual. It might be that you create your own style.

Japa Meditation

Focusing on an object, thought or chant

Mindfulness Meditation

Learning to become totally aware of your surroundings

Breath or Zen Meditation

Using the breath as your focus

Kriya Meditation

Covers wide range of technique from mantra and pranayama and mind / body control

Vipassana Meditation

A process of self-observation

Guided Meditation

A teacher (or recording) guides you through a thought process, a guided visualisation.

A Healthier Lifestyle

It is an interesting journey through learning meditation. If you stick with it and practice you will begin to find a healthier you in so many different ways.

Not only will you benefit from the physical aspects of increased oxygen, improved cognitive function and revitalised energy but you will improve your psychological health also with less stress, dealing with the frustration of day-to-day living and reduced anxiety. You might even find a natural tendency to want to eat healthier. Over time I have found the desire to eat less meat and processed foods and move to a more natural diet. I have reduced my sugar intake and found that cravings for certain foods have begun to diminish. That is not to say I don't have relapses because I most certainly do. I wouldn't be human if I didn't. However I am very conscious of the effects certain foods have on my body and I make every effort to ensure I make a conscious decision to act on my urges to break from a healthier lifestyle.

I believe that a mindful way of living is imperative to good health and happiness. This is what my meditation practice has led me to - a mindful approach to life: Mindful Living

I hope that I have been able to point you in towards a meditative path so that you gain the same benefits I have.

Good luck with your journey into Mindful Living

Namaste

Kaderah