

SIT KIT

Essentials for Daily Meditation

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“It’s not the daily increase but the daily decrease.
Hack away at the unessential.”

—Bruce Lee

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

1. A simple chair or cushion.
2. Patience.

THE FOUR STEPS

1. Align your body for stability and comfort.
2. Relax deeply while staying aligned.
3. Feel your breath.
4. Allow your breath to quiet.

1. ALIGN YOUR BODY FOR STABILITY AND COMFORT

The body is first. Until you can sit still, seated meditation is almost impossible. If you have physical issues, modify these instructions as necessary.

Foundation: If using a cushion, knees should be level with or below the hips, ideally on the ground. If this isn't happening, use a chair. The chair should be simple and firm, not too cushy. If possible, sit forward so you're not leaning against the back of the chair. Feet are flat on the ground under the knees.

Spine: Whether on a cushion or chair, root your sitting bones and lift your ribs enough to decompress the lower back and take any pressure off your tailbone. Lift your breastbone slightly, feeling a sense of dignity and alertness. Relax your shoulders. Chin is parallel to the floor and slightly in toward your throat until you feel your neck lengthen.

Hands: Rest them on your thighs or lap so they're supported and relaxed, close enough to the torso so there's no pulling or effort to keep them there. Hands and arms are dead weight. No need for mudras (hand gestures). Keep it simple.

Eyes: Keep them open, resting your gaze softly on a blank wall in front of you or on the floor a few feet ahead. If this makes you dizzy or nauseous, close your eyes.

If you're seated on a cushion and need to recross your legs, do so meditatively and immediately return to stillness. Practice aligning your body until you can sit comfortably without moving. Then proceed to Step 2.

2. RELAX DEEPLY WHILE STAYING ALIGNED

Relax all muscles, major and minor, that you don't need to maintain your alignment. Meet any tension you notice with conscious relaxation.

Feel how deeply your body can relax. Breathe naturally. You can use your exhalations to keep letting go.

Relax into stillness and be aware of that stillness. Keep practicing this step until you can sit comfortably still for 10 minutes.

If your body doesn't feel stable or comfortable, return to Step 1.

3. FEEL YOUR BREATH

Don't manipulate your breath. Let it be natural, and simply rest your attention on how it feels. Feel it directly, in one place where the sensations are most noticeable: either the nostrils or the abdomen. Rest your attention on the sensations of breathing. If you notice the mind wandering, gently come back to feeling the breath.

Practice this for at least 20 minutes, until your attention rests easily and naturally on your breath. If your body becomes prohibitively uncomfortable, cycle back through Steps 1 & 2 and then continue practicing this step.

4. ALLOW YOUR BREATH TO QUIET

Never suppress your breath; let it quiet naturally. Then rest attention on the quiet breath. Notice the urge to think or shift attention. Keep quietude at the forefront, even as thoughts, feelings or sounds arise.

Cycle back through previous steps as necessary until you can sit easily for 30 minutes, with moments of the mind at rest, aware but not thinking.

Sit longer as desired, but sit at least once a day every day.

If 30 minutes is too long, start with five or ten. The quality of your attention and effort is more important than the duration. Better to sit two minutes with awareness than an hour without it.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Do I really have to meditate every day?

The practice is established with regularity. Otherwise you won't get the full benefits or you might quit. Make it a no-brainer, like brushing your teeth. Make sure to bring some enthusiasm and curiosity to your practice. You shouldn't feel like you're torturing yourself.

I have arthritis in my hips and it's painful to sit. Can I lie down instead?

It's better to sit up if you can find a way. If you lie down, it's easy to space out or fall asleep. Experiment with ways to sit up, and if you end up on your back, remain vigilant.

Is it better to sit on a cushion than in a chair?

No, it just depends on your body. Try both and see which affords you the most stability and comfort.

Why eyes open instead of closed?

Eyes open helps keep you present. It's easier to space out with the eyes closed.

I have an extremely active monkey mind. Is there something additional I can do to quiet it down?

Just be aware. Notice the thoughts and let them pass like clouds in the sky. Be the sky. This isn't about getting rid of thoughts; it's about changing your relationship to them.

What about music? Or guided meditations or visualizations?

It's best not to introduce additional content. Be attentive to the content that's already there—bodily sensations, breath, thoughts. Keep it simple.

I have respiratory issues. Sometimes I have a hard time breathing.

Just breathe as you need to. If it's too disturbing to rest attention on the breath, feel bodily sensations instead. Just get as relaxed and as attentive as you can.

I have a lot of anxiety, and sometimes sitting makes it worse.

Then don't sit. Anything can be a meditation: walking, swimming, doing a puzzle—any solitary activity that you enjoy. The main thing is to be relaxed and attentive to what you're doing.

I've been getting into this deep, dreamy state between sleeping and waking. It's very pleasant, but I'm wondering if that's good.

As long as you stay aware. Try not to space out. If you feel drowsy, widen your eyes, check your posture, whatever you have to do. Depth is good, but keep paying attention.

What about coffee?

If it keeps you from nodding off, drink it.

Nothing seems to be happening for me. How long should I give it?

Sometimes the changes are gradual, and not easy to notice. Give it 40 days, and don't attach to any results or outcomes. Expectations only get in the way.

Can you recommend other books on meditation?

You yourself are a billion-page book packed with wisdom. Read you. Stick to the practice, and the books you're asking about will come along.