

Tips for Meditating

Stress is one of the biggest health concerns we have. As a result of our crazy lives, over time we are secreting high levels of the hormone cortisol plus too much adrenaline. This has been linked to all modern health conditions.

The issue is not just secreting too much cortisol but also not lowering the cortisol levels once they are high. Stress management and stress reduction have become a focus for improving health and preventing health issues.

Meditation is one way to reduce cortisol. Sometimes we can't control the hectic lives we lead; however, we can take time every day to lower cortisol to help the body recover



What is meditation?

Think of it as a vacation for your brain or taking a break from your daily thoughts. Research has shown that meditation has many health benefits beyond stress relief. It aids weight loss, helps heart health, increases happiness, heightens productivity, and even helps rebuild the brain's gray matter.

There are many ways to meditate. Here are a few tips:

- 1.** The simplest method is deep breathing. Close your eyes. Slowly breathe in through your nose, filling your belly and lungs, and slowly breathe out through your nose or mouth, whatever feels most comfortable. The slower you can breathe in and out, the better. You can do this any time and anywhere – whatever is the most convenient.

It's best to find a quiet spot and do it purposely, but you can be meditating while sitting in traffic, if needed. The process lowers cortisol, and the more you do that throughout the day, the better.

- 2.** Start with two minutes and work up, if that's what feels right to you.

3. Let whatever thoughts you have come into your mind. If they are unpleasant, acknowledge them, and then try to think of something more positive. The easiest way to do this is to focus on something good in your life. It can be anything – from something deep and important or something simple like a great meal you had.
4. For longer meditation sessions, mark them on your calendar. Make time for meditating. When we are stressed, we tend to neglect activities that are voluntary, like exercise or having fun. Meditation is also something people will neglect if they are busy. So, commit and schedule at least three times throughout the week to do it.
5. That being said, should you miss your scheduled meditation time, don't beat yourself up about it. That is stressful and, therefore, is counterproductive.
6. If you have a busy schedule all day long, it may work well to meditate either in the early morning when you first wake up or before you go to sleep at night. Morning meditations help energize the brain and body for the day. And evening meditations can help relax the mind for a better night's sleep. However, meditation at any time during the day is beneficial so pick what works best for you.
7. For many people, meditating is hard to do. They feel uncomfortable sitting still doing nothing, and their mind will not be quiet. Don't be afraid to say that traditional meditation is not for you.
8. Mindfulness meditation is an alternative form of meditation which teaches you how to focus on the present. Mindfulness can be as simple as sitting quietly, staring at your hands, and noticing every detail. Or it can be an actual task like cooking dinner and noticing the looks of the ingredients, the smell, and how they transform as they cook. By focusing on the present, you block the cause of your stress from your mind, providing the vacation it needs.
9. Stress reduction can take other forms. It can be anything that makes you feel good. What do you like to daydream about? Don't be afraid to just sit quietly and let your mind dream about what makes you happy. It could be a place, people you love and enjoy, foods you love – whatever makes you feel good.



10. Go for a walk in the fresh air. In a forest is even better and be sure to pay attention to what you see as you walk – the trees, the houses, the birds. This is another form of mindfulness.

11. If you're going to try a more traditional type of meditation, use a mantra. What's a mantra? It's a word repeated in your mind or said out loud if you prefer. The most common one is "OM" or "AUM," also know as the sound of the universe. In Qi Gong, the word is "sung." The words have a vibrational resonance that you can feel in your body. More importantly, you can't be thinking other thoughts because you're too busy thinking "OM" or "sung."

There are other forms of mantras. Some are a phrase instead of a word, such as "be the change you wish to see in the world" from Gandhi. There are many others that have a connection to religion or ethnic traditions. It doesn't matter. Physiologically, the mind is at peace because you have blocked the stressful thoughts with other thought or words. Google "mantra." You'll find many to choose from. Pick what works the best for you, but don't overthink it as that's stressful, too.

12. Teach your body to relax by lying in bed or sitting in a comfortable chair. In your mind tell yourself to relax various parts of your body as follows: head, neck, shoulders and chest, upper back, arms and hands, lower back and butt, abdomen, legs and feet, whole body. Say the body part in your head or out loud, along with the word "relax" as you inhale and then say your mantra as you exhale. After you relax each body part, do it with the words "whole body" three times.

It can take up to three months before you can literally feel the body parts relax as you do this. However, once you have trained your body, you'll be able to relax your body on command.

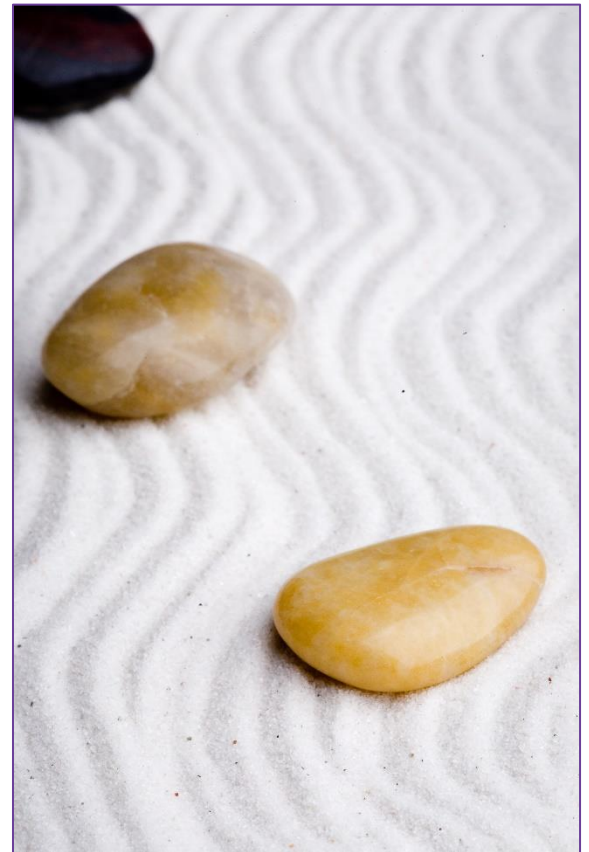


13. If you want a guided meditation, there are many YouTube videos you can find. Just look up “guided meditations.” For audio only, here are [several from Deepak Chopra](#). Give them a try or download the *Insight timer* app. You may find it suits you.

14. Try a meditation device or [HeartMath](#) HRV:

Muse: A headset that connects to an app on your phone. It helps you know how you're doing as you meditate. If your mind is quiet, you hear a gentle wind. If your mind starts being too active, then the wind will be more turbulent. [Check it out here](#).

Meaning to Pause: It's a bracelet that sends a gentle vibration every 60–90 minutes as a reminder to reframe your thoughts or take a deep breath or be mindful. Or you can just take the moment to practice gratitude. [Check it out here](#).



15. You may find joining a meditation group is helpful for you. You'll receive guidance and be in a supportive environment. It's social and will also help you step out of your busy life for a moment in time.

Simple Meditation Exercise:

If you're not sure what to do first, try the following. It helps the body relax. When we are stressed, we transfer our stress into our body, which is often why stress is associated with aches and pains. This can be done any time, but it's great to do before going to sleep.

Anytime you are meditating or just trying to relax, lower your shoulders. It does not matter whether you're sitting, standing, or lying down. There is a tendency to hunch the shoulders during times of stress. This causes more neck and head tension. This also contributes to headaches and upper back issues, which can throw off the alignment of the rest of the body. It's also hard to relax with hunched shoulders.

Lie in bed. Tell each part of your body to relax. Do each part and then the whole body. When you say the words, you can say them out loud or in your head.

- As you inhale, say: "Head, relax." As you exhale, think or say your mantra.
- As you inhale, say: "Neck, shoulders, and chest relax." As you exhale, think or say your mantra.
- As you inhale, say: "Upper back, relax." As you exhale, think or say your mantra.
- As you inhale, say: "Arms and hands, relax." As you exhale, think or say your mantra.
- As you inhale, say: "Lower back and butt, relax." As you exhale, think or say your mantra.
- As you inhale, say: "Abdomen, relax." As you exhale, think or say your mantra.
- As you inhale, say: "Legs and feet, relax." As you exhale, think or say your mantra.
- As you inhale, say: "Whole body, relax." As you exhale, think or say your mantra.
- Do your "whole body" three times.

It takes up to three months before you literally feel your body relax when you instruct it to do so. But once you have mastered this, you will have more control over your body. The key is to focus, as doing this will also prevent you from thinking about other things that are stressing you out. Your body will relax and so will your mind.



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