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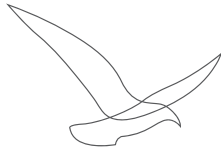


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1

WHAT IS MEDITATION?

MEDITATION is a practice in which one uses a particular technique, such as mindfulness or concentrating on your breath, to train or exercise the mind. The exact techniques can differ, but most generally centre around the concept of quieting the mind to cultivate a state of focus and concentration.

Most definitions of meditation have the following elements in common:

- 🌿 Calming and relaxing the mind.
- 🌿 A focus point of attention.
- 🌿 Awareness and observation of your thoughts.

Merriam-Webster provides the following definition:



To engage in contemplation or reflection;

To engage in mental exercise (such as concentration on one's breathing or repetition of a mantra) for the purpose of reaching a heightened level of spiritual awareness.¹



Meditation is about becoming more aware in the present moment, rather than becoming a new, or different person.

The earliest records of meditation are found in the East, in the ancient Hindu texts known as the Vedas, but it has seen increasing popularity in the West. In its traditional form, meditation was used to find deeper meaning in life, to connect to a higher power, and to ease suffering. These days it is also used for its health and wellness benefits, for personal growth, and to improve performance, thereby allowing one to function at optimal levels. The practice has been adopted in many different contexts, including business and health industries, with stress management being one of the primary reasons that people turn to meditation.

Learning to meditate is simply learning another skill – and it is a crucial skill in any leader’s toolkit. Think of it as exercising a muscle – training for your brain. It takes practice to get to a point where you are comfortable and at ease with meditation, but it is well worth the effort.

WHAT TYPE OF MEDITATION IS RIGHT FOR ME?

There is no right or wrong way to meditate, but you will likely find one specific technique that works best for you.

Different meditation techniques can be broadly classified into the following categories:²

- 🌿 **MINDFULNESS MEDITATION** is a type of meditation in which you focus on being completely aware of what you’re sensing and feeling in the moment, without interpretation or judgment. It can be practised anywhere and at any time. This type of meditation has become popular in the West but it is rooted in Buddhist traditions.
- 🌿 **SPIRITUAL MEDITATION** can be defined as a practice in which you connect to God, the universe, or a higher power (whatever your name for it). As with prayer, with this technique, one focuses on building a connection with a higher power and gaining a deeper

Mindfulness meditation Spiritual meditation Focused meditation

understanding. This type of meditation can be practised in a place of worship or at home.

It includes:

- Hindu mantras or mala meditations.
- Kabbalistic practices rooted in Jewish tradition.
- Sufi teachings, such as Sufi dhikr.
- Reflection on one's mortality, or Marañasati, from Theravada Buddhism.
- Metta meditation, from Buddhism.
- Shamanic trance states.
- Christian contemplative prayer.
- Zazen meditation in Zen Buddhism.

🕉️ **FOCUSED MEDITATION** involves concentrating using any of the five senses. Typically, this helps the individual to build up their concentration and attention span. The meditator focuses their attention on an object, like a candle or their breath.

🕉️ **MOVEMENT MEDITATION** may be a workable solution for meditators who struggle to sit still. This type of meditation guides individuals through gentle movement and includes yoga, tai chi and qigong.


🕉️ **MANTRA MEDITATION** involves the repetition of a word, syllable or phrase. The practice is common in Hindu or Buddhist traditions but does exist in a number of spiritual traditions, including Judeo-Christian and shamanic practices. A mantra can be chanted aloud or said silently. Some meditators prefer to focus on a word instead of their breath.

🕉️ **TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION** is a variation on mantra meditation. The main difference is that in transcendental meditation, the mantra is a meaningless sound. The technique was popularised in the west in the 1970s by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the founder of the Transcendental Meditation Organisation. Celebrity practitioners included the Beatles, who traveled to India to learn directly from the Yogi. More recent supporters include Hugh Jackman, Ellen DeGeneres and Russell Brand.



Movement meditation Mantra meditation Transcendental meditation

- 🌿 **PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION** is a great way to quickly reduce tension and stress in the body. It involves slowing, tightening and relaxing each muscle group in the body, one after the other, from head to foot.
- 🌿 **LOVING-KINDNESS MEDITATION** involves the sending and receiving of love energy to other people. This practice is intended to promote feelings of compassion and kindness. It is recommended for those wanting to release feelings of anger and resentment.
- 🌿 **VISUALISATION MEDITATION** focuses on the visualisation of positive scenes or images by using all five senses. A variation on this technique is imagining reaching specific goals or desired outcomes.
- 🌿 **YOGIC PRACTICES** include techniques such as regulated breathing.



'So, what is a good meditator?
It's just one who meditates.'

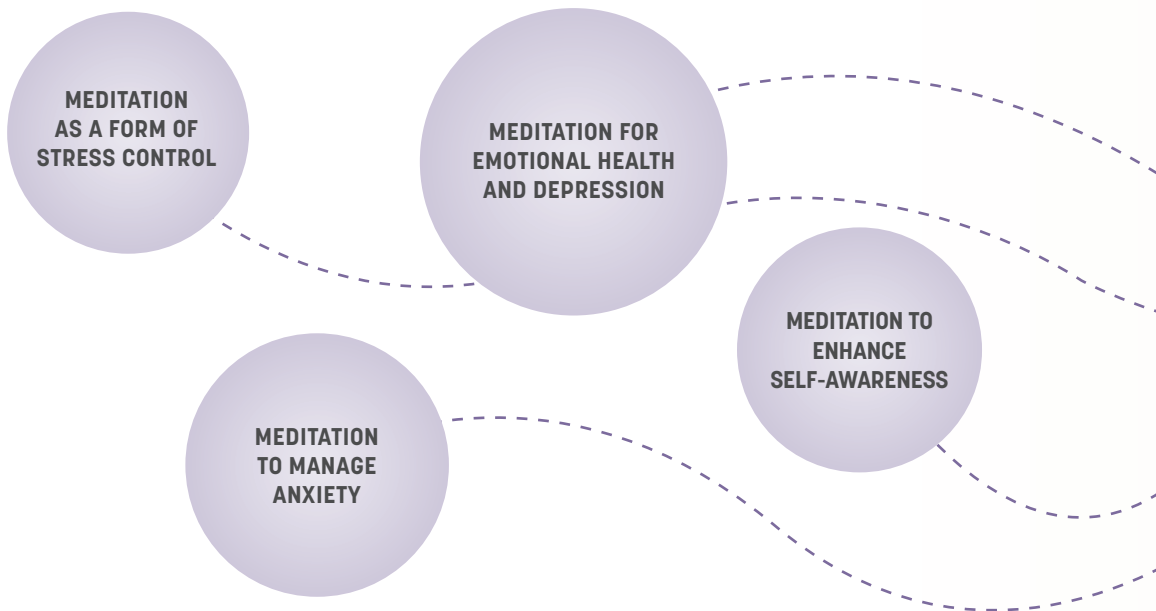
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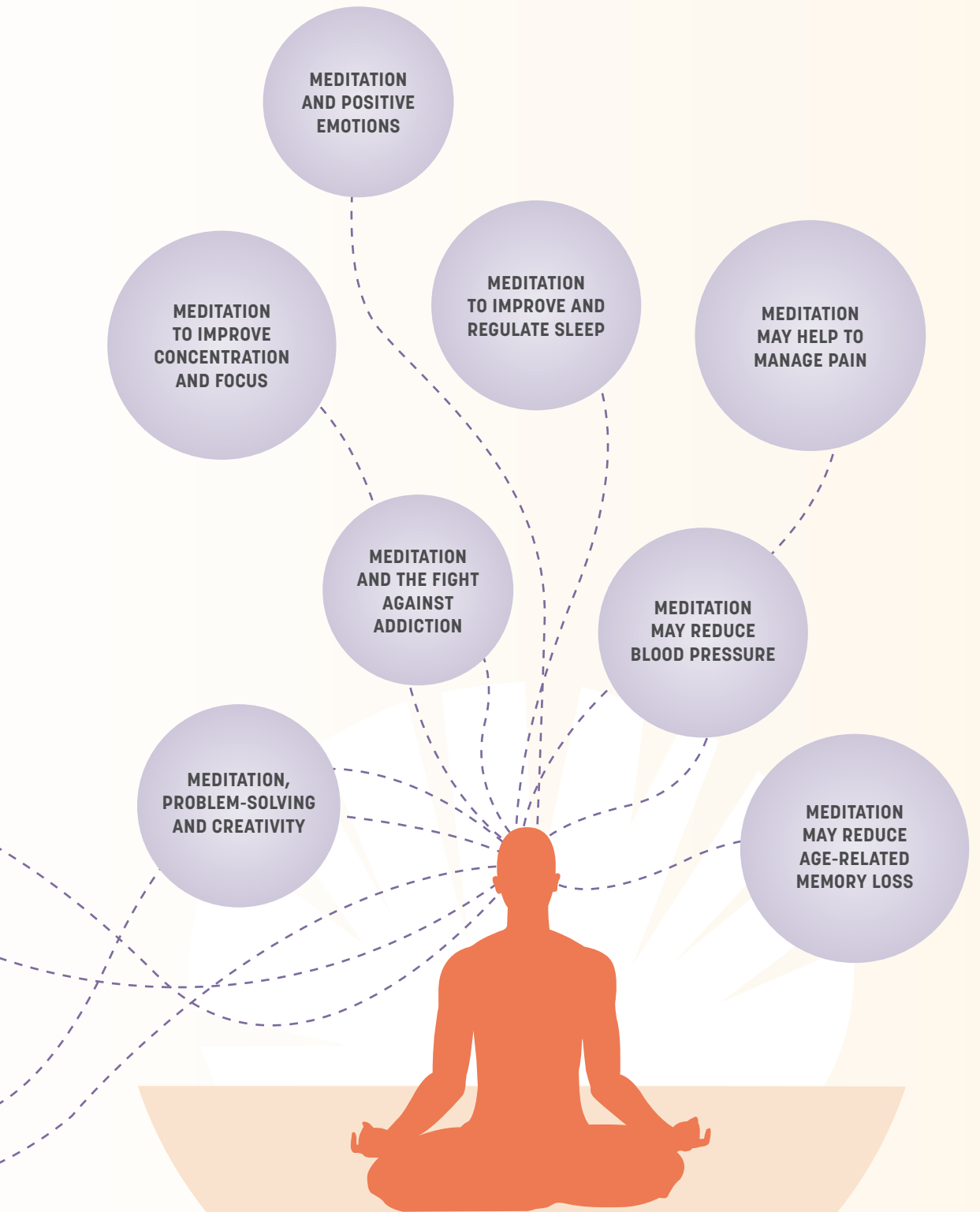


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WHY MEDITATE? WHAT SCIENCE SAYS

There are many documented benefits to meditation. In this chapter, we will review those benefits, as reported by scientific research. Here is a graphic summary of the benefits you will read about.







'Calmness is the
cradle of power.'

JOSIAH GILBERT HOLLAND

MEDITATION AS A FORM OF STRESS CONTROL

Stress is a typical human response. It can be defined as:³⁴

- **Situations or events that put pressure on us. For example, times when we have a lot to do and think about, or we don't have much control over what happens to us.**
- **Our reaction to being placed under pressure: the feelings we experience when we have demands placed on us with which we find difficult to cope.**

As most of us have experienced, stress is part and parcel of our personal and professional lives. When we experience a change or a challenge, the body responds both physically and mentally.

Stress can be grouped as follows:

ACUTE STRESS

This type of stress is short-lived. Examples may include the feeling when you narrowly avoid a car accident, or have to give a presentation to a large audience. The stressors can come from the experience of having to do something new or exciting, or from managing dangerous situations.

CHRONIC STRESS

This type of stress is of a longer duration (weeks or months). Examples include dealing with non-performing employees at work, or financial problems.

Although it may not seem so, acute stress can impact us positively by enhancing our focus, motivation and alertness. For instance, it could help push us to meet a tough deadline.

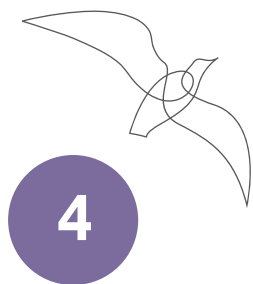
With a stress reaction, the physical body releases flight-or-fight hormones, which in turn increase our pulse rate and promote feelings of alertness. In the short term, these hormones are of benefit to our bodies as they allow us to manage the stressors or challenges.

However, in instances of chronic stress, the body remains in this heightened state, even though there is no imminent danger to which it should react.

Over time, one then becomes at greater risk of developing a host of health problems, including high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes. Sleep disruptions also contribute to fatigue and cloudy thinking.

The management of stress is one of the most popular reasons for people turning to meditation. A review of a study that included 47 trials with more than 3 500 participants³⁵ reported that mindfulness meditation programmes result in reduced stress and anxiety.

Additional research also revealed that meditation can reduce some of the physical symptoms of stress experienced in the body, while mindfulness meditation can reduce the neurogenic inflammation caused by stress.³⁶



MEDITATION TECHNIQUES

CANDLE MEDITATION



difficulty / easy
duration / 5 minutes, plus
keywords / focus, concentration

This is one of the simplest yet most powerful meditation techniques one can use. Unlike most meditations, this one requires the practitioner to keep their eyes open and to focus on a particular object or point. This is commonly done with a candle as the focal point. The aim is to keep your focus and attention on the flame of the candle.



USE WHEN

You are starting out in meditation. As this is done with the eyes open, it's an excellent option for a person with a restless or wandering mind. It's easier to stay focused when you concentrate on a physical object, like a candle. Use this technique to improve your concentration and develop your memory.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Find a quiet space; preferably a darkened room.
- 2 Switch off your cellphone and avoid distractions.
- 3 Find a comfortable position in which to sit.
- 4 Place a candle on a flat surface at eye level, with no flammable materials close by.
- 5 Stare at the flame.
- 6 The flame should become the focus of your attention. Everything in the room should fade away from your awareness.
- 7 If your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to the flame.

OPTIONAL

Different colour candles are thought to embody different qualities. Have fun and play with colour.



QUICK TIPS

For candles that burn longer, select those that are made from:

- 🌿 Soy wax (from soybean or palm oil).
- 🌿 Beeswax (produced from the flower nectar made by bees).

Round candles burn the longest, as the wick is evenly spaced from all of the edges of the candle.

5-5-5, OR THE JUST-BREATHE MEDITATION



difficulty / easy
duration / 75 seconds
keywords / calming, stress relief

There are several techniques that employ the breath as the basis for relaxation. The following technique is one that I utilise on a daily basis. It's quick, and you can use the technique as you sit at your office desk, or practically anywhere else.

The next time you are tense about meeting a deadline, or ruminating about conflict with a colleague, this technique is worth a try. After all, you have nothing to lose but your stress. It's an easy practice for quickly releasing stress or tension that you have been holding in your body.

USE WHEN

You are stressed. This technique signals your body to relax, release stress and calm your heart rate. It's perfect to use during a hard day at the office when you need to quickly release tension.

This technique can be employed more than once a day, for as little as 75 seconds at a time.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Breathe in slowly through your nose for 5 seconds: 1-2-3-4-5.
- 2 Hold your breath for 5 seconds: 1-2-3-4-5.
- 3 Exhale slowly through your nose or mouth for 5 seconds: 1-2-3-4-5.
- 4 Repeat the process 4 more times.
- 5 Check in with yourself to see how you are feeling. You should feel noticeably calmer and more relaxed.

ADVANCED TECHNIQUE

As you continue to practise this technique, try to build up to 10-10-10, i.e. breathe in for 10 seconds, hold your breath for 10 seconds, and breathe out for 10 seconds.



QUICK TIP

If you wear a watch that tracks your heart rate, you should see a noticeable improvement in your resting heart rate after the practice.

METTA MEDITATION (LOVING-KINDNESS MEDITATION)



difficulty / easy

duration / 5 minutes, plus

keywords / self-compassion, peace, joy

Metta translates from Pali, a language closely related to Sanskrit, to mean 'kindness' or 'positive energy' or 'goodwill'. It is also known as the loving-kindness meditation.

Although the technique is rooted in Buddhism, it has evolved in different traditions and is practised in different ways. Metta is an active form of meditation in which, instead of focusing on the breath, one sends loving kindness or good wishes into the world.

The main goal of all metta meditations is to develop positive emotions and an outlook of loving kindness towards everything and all beings, including all sources of stress.

Positive emotions associated with this technique include feelings of gratitude, love, joy, peace, trust, compassion and happiness. During the meditation, you can repeat words or phrases that express these feelings, either silently or aloud.



QUARTER LOTUS



difficulty / easy

With this pose, you cross your legs by bending your knees and placing your feet on the calves of the opposite leg. This is one of the easier poses for beginners to adopt.



BENEFITS OF THE LOTUS POSES

These poses are known to assist in calming the mind and preparing the practitioner for deep meditation. In all of its variations, it increases hip flexibility and helps to tone the core. The pose also stretches the muscles around the pelvis, legs and ankles. It helps one to stretch the ankles and knees. As the pose assists in improving circulation and blood flow in the pelvic region, it can also ease menstrual pain.



TIPS TO GET STARTED

- 🌸 Full lotus pose can be intense and strenuous on the knees and hips. Practise with your back against a wall, for additional support. It may take time until you are comfortable in this pose, so give yourself time to adapt.
- 🌸 Build your base. It is recommended that one start with the quarter lotus pose and then progress to the half lotus and finally to the full lotus, as you continue to build stamina and strength.
- 🌸 Warm up. Beginners are advised to warm and open up their hips. Warm-up exercises include making hip circles. Using slow movements, roll your hips in a complete circle in small, medium or large motions, in a clockwise direction. Do this for 1–3 minutes, then switch and complete in an anticlockwise direction. An alternative exercise is to place the soles of your feet together and allow the knees to fall open. This allows for a gentle stretch of the hips and a rotation of the thighs.
- 🌸 Place a pillow or cushion underneath each knee. You could also sit on a blanket or cushion, which will provide additional support and increase your comfort.
- 🌸 Switch it up. Ensure that you change the cross of your leg so that you grow comfortable holding the pose with either leg. You could either alternate how you cross your legs every other day, or change the pose halfway through a meditation.

CONTRAINDICATIONS

Avoid the lotus pose and variations if you are suffering any discomfort or injury to the ankle, calf or knee. Also avoid this position if you suffer from sciatic nerve-related problems.



'The best way to
capture moments is to
pay attention.'

JON KABAT-ZINN

GYAN MUDRA (GESTURE OF KNOWLEDGE OR WISDOM)

One of the most commonly used and popular mudras, Gyan mudra, is also known as Chin or Cin mudra. Gyan translates as 'knowledge' or 'wisdom' from Sanskrit, hence this mudra is sometimes known as the mudra of knowledge. It is used mainly to maintain stability in seated meditation, and it promotes the flow of energy through the body.



USE WHEN

You need to focus or concentrate, improve working memory and gain insight and knowledge. This mudra also helps to reduce headaches and sleep ailments, and ease depression. It can also improve physical balance.

When practised during meditation, it can assist with mental clarity and increased focus. As an air element, this mudra also leads to improved nervous system and pituitary gland function.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Gently touch your index fingertip to the tip of your thumb. Your remaining fingers are stretched outwards.
- 2 Practise the mudra in seated or standing position. Can be combined with breathing exercises.

Element: Air

