

Just Chill



MEDITATION IS FOR YOU! Even if you can't picture sitting perfectly still or completely quieting your brain, you can meditate—and tap into its many health benefits. Keep reading to find a style that's the right fit.

Thanks to an ever-expanding body of research showing an almost endless list of benefits—including lower blood pressure, less anxiety, relief from chronic pain, just to name a few—meditation has truly gone mainstream. Schools are teaching it to kids to help them stress less and perform better; airlines, including Virgin Atlantic and Delta, have in-flight meditation options; and even the United States Marines have offered mindfulness training before deployments.

With so much evidence piling up, why aren't we all booking one-way tickets to the Land of Zen? We can't sit still. Our mind wanders. We're too busy.

Forget the excuses. First off, time isn't truly a barrier, says psychologist Elisha Goldstein, Ph.D., author of *Uncovering Happiness: Overcoming Depression with Mindfulness and Self-Compassion*. Goldstein's research found that meditating five minutes a day, five days a week was enough to lower stress and even enhance the connection you feel with others.

Second, you don't have to sit completely still at a specific time. "Meditation and



TRY A MINDFUL MOMENT DOING DISHES
As you wash, focus on the warmth of the water, the smoothness of the dishes, the tickle of the suds.

mindfulness can be woven throughout your day, wherever you are," Goldstein says. "You might take a mindful walk focusing on your footsteps or pause in your morning shower to pay attention to how the water feels on your skin. It's all about finding what works for you."

The biggest and most practical benefit of practicing meditation or weaving moments of mindfulness into your day: You'll enjoy life more while managing the constant juggling act. "Practicing meditation and being more mindful allows you to be more present for your family, your job, your workout—everything."

Not quite sure how to do it? Our guide will get you started.

READY, SET, FOCUS

Meditation isn't about emptying your head of thoughts, it's about bringing focus to them. "When you realize your mind is wandering, that's the moment meditation starts to work its magic," Goldstein says. The process of noticing your thoughts drifting, and the effort you make to bring them back (without criticizing yourself), builds your inner patience and calm. That's why meditation is called a practice.

what's your meditation type?

All forms of meditation work in a similar way: You choose something to focus on—your breath, an image—and when your mind wanders, you gently bring it back. The key is finding a style that works for you. Here's a snapshot of four types. Take your pick!

1 MINDFUL MEDITATION

■ **In a nutshell** Mindfulness is about being aware of your thoughts, emotions, and environment in a nonjudgmental way; you're staying in the present and observing everything you're feeling and thinking. "Mindfulness is about accepting our feelings and thoughts as they are," says Michelle Becker, an instructor at the UC San Diego Center for Mindfulness.

■ **How it works** You can do this anywhere: at home, in the office, on hold with customer service. Begin by focusing on your breath. Each time your mind drifts, bring your attention back. Don't criticize. Instead of thinking, *I'm so bad at this*, think, *Aah, welcome back*.

2 MANTRA MEDITATION

■ **In a nutshell** This technique involves choosing a mantra—typically a one- or two-syllable sound or word that you silently repeat to yourself. This allows you to be in a restful yet alert state, says Anjali Bhagra, M.D., associate professor of medicine and chair of education of Mayo Clinic's Integrative Medicine and Health program.

■ **How it works** Sit in a comfortable position and begin silently repeating your word. Om is a popular one, but choose any word or sound that you like. As you become more practiced, you may make your mantra a quality you'd like to have more of: patience, compassion, joy.

3 WALKING MEDITATION

■ **In a nutshell** This is basically an on-the-go form of mindful meditation, but instead of focusing your awareness on your breath, you're noticing the sensations of walking, says Becker, who suggests beginning by practicing in your backyard. Eventually, you can move to somewhere calm like a nature preserve, then start weaving it into your daily life: walking mindfully across the parking lot to your office, while shopping, or to meet a friend.

■ **How it works** Start in a standing position, noticing how your feet feel. Do you feel pressure where your feet are in contact with the ground? Start walking, paying attention to how your

weight shifts from one side of your body to the other. Notice how it feels as you lift your foot, place your heel down, prepare for your next step. Continue walking, and any time your mind wanders from focusing on how you're walking, gently bring it back.

4 GUIDED MEDITATION

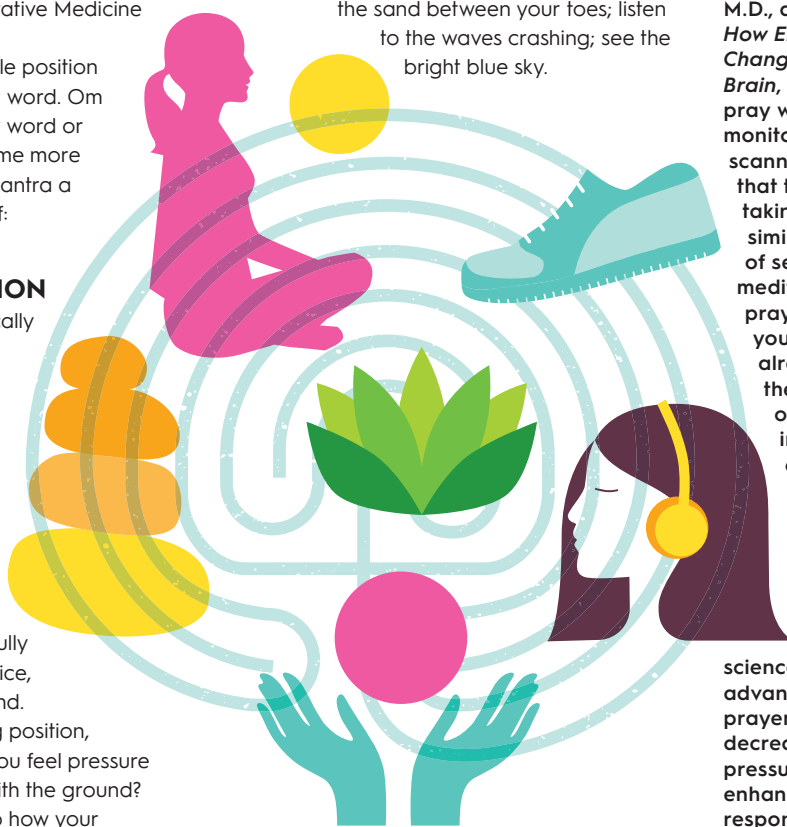
■ **In a nutshell** This is based on the theory that your body can respond to imagery as it would to a genuine experience. (Need proof? Imagine yourself sucking on a lemon right now.) Guided meditation typically uses a script to walk you through a relaxing, enjoyable scenario to promote calm.

■ **How it works** With each breath, imagine yourself inhaling IN relaxation and exhaling OUT tension. As your body relaxes, picture yourself at the beach or another calming, pleasant place. Imagine the scene in detail, using all of your senses: Feel the sun's rays warming your skin and the sand between your toes; listen to the waves crashing; see the bright blue sky.

TRY A MINDFUL MOMENT

WAITING IN LINE

Silently repeat to yourself: "May the cashier be happy and at ease." It can help defuse an irritating situation.



BENEFITS OF PRAYER

When neuroscientist Andrew Newberg, M.D., author of *How Enlightenment Changes Your Brain*, asked nuns to pray while being monitored by a brain scanner, he noticed that the changes taking place were similar to those of seasoned meditators. If you pray regularly, you're likely already reaping the benefits of meditation, including less anxiety and a sharpened sense of focus and calm. Likewise, people who meditate enjoy the science-backed advantages of prayer, such as decreased blood pressure and enhanced immune response.



Go from om to zzz

If your favorite part of yoga is the last five minutes when you drift into stillness and emerge feeling rejuvenated, then you'll probably love yoga nidra, or sleep meditation. In this guided meditation, a calming voice leads you from a waking to dreaming state and ultimately, into deep sleep. Don't be fooled by the name: Yoga nidra doesn't involve traditional asana poses, says Karen Brody, founder of Bold Tranquility, a yoga nidra meditation company for women and author of the forthcoming book *Daring to Rest*. Yoga nidra can be an easy way to start exploring meditation because you can practice it when falling asleep or if you wake up in the middle of the night.

To get some guidance to start, download a series of 20-minute yoga nidra meditations

from Brody's free Recharge Series on iTunes or try the free download iRest Program for Restful Sleep and Peace of Mind (*irest.us*).

TRY A MINDFUL MOMENT
BRUSHING YOUR TEETH
 Don't zone out. Focus on the circular, repetitive movement of the toothbrush and the taste of the toothpaste.

INNER PEACE

There's an app for that:



BUDDHIFY.COM
 Short guided meditations perfect for beginners. \$4.99



CALM.COM
 Guided sessions, plus 25 soothing sounds to tune out stress. Free 7 Days of Calm trial. \$9.99 a month



HEADSPACE.COM
 Learn to meditate, then apply mindfulness to everyday activities. \$6.24 a month

THIS IS HOW WE MEDITATE

“I USE A PAIR OF HIGH-QUALITY, OVER-EAR HEADPHONES

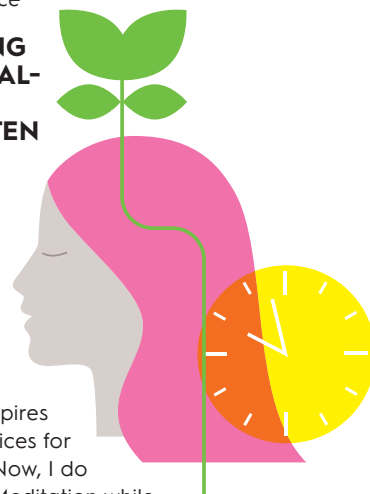
to accompany my favorite guided meditation apps or ambient music. I use them nearly exclusively for meditation, so they feel distinctive in their purpose, and they help me have an immersive experience. When I see them, I'm subtly reminded to do my daily meditation practice.” — Anastasia Alt, 27, founder of Dream Space

“I'M A WORKING MOM OF A SPECIAL-NEEDS CHILD, AND MY LIFE OFTEN FEELS HECTIC

and filled with a million to-dos. When a friend urged me to try a meditation app, I was hesitant, but I tried it and was instantly hooked. Meditating makes me feel better about myself, which inspires me to make better choices for my family and myself. Now, I do the app's Commuting Meditation while taking the train to and from work, and I use the deep sleep meditations before bed. Bonus: My son likes to fall asleep to it, too.” — Lisa Quinones-Fontanez, 40, blogger

“I'M A REALLY ACTIVE PERSON, SO SITTING FOR ANY LENGTH OF TIME IS A CHALLENGE.

Walking meditation is my thing. I do my best meditations running on the beach or hiking, and if I'm moved to sit, I plunk myself down in nature.” — Tracy Barone, 53, author of Happy Family



KID ZONE

Children are naturally good meditators; they're living very much in the moment. "Considering the overscheduled culture in which kids are growing up, it means a lot for them to be able to just stop and be calm without having to perform or be judged," explains Eline Snel, author of *Sitting Still Like a Frog: Mindfulness Exercises for Kids*.

Around age 5 is a good time to

introduce meditation in a relaxed, simple way by encouraging kids to pay attention to their breath, Snel says. She recommends this basic exercise for kids and adults to do together:

Sit in a comfortable spot on the floor with legs crossed. Ask your child to place her right hand flat on the floor in front of her, fingers spread. (You do the same.) Begin by touching

the base of your right thumb with a finger from the left hand, slowly moving up along the thumb while inhaling quietly. Once you've both reached the top of your thumbs, move slowly back down while exhaling. Move onto the remaining fingers, inhaling as you move up and exhaling as you come back down. Repeat with the other hand. ■