



# MEDITATION MYTH BUSTING AND HOW TO GET STARTED

By Liz Lowe

Meditation helps us learn about ourselves and move through life with more ease. This month, we tackle some misconceptions and offer a framework for a simple mindful meditation practice.

## YOU CAN SIT COMFORTABLY

Sitting on a chair - palms on thighs, feet on the floor - works well, as does any comfortable position that allows good posture. A soft, downward gaze helps keep you present but not too stimulated. Lotus position definitely not required.

## THE GOAL ISN'T A CLEAR MIND

Experiencing fewer or 'better' thoughts isn't the aim. The aim is to stay present in the experience, however it unfolds, and through this develop self-awareness.

Focusing on the breath helps still the mind, but thoughts will inevitably arise. Observe them without judgement and with the knowledge that, like feelings, they will change and pass. Then simply return to your breath.

The moments you're able to sit with yourself in stillness may be fleeting and infrequent, especially initially, and that's fine.

## MEDITATION CAN BE ACTIVE

You can apply the attentiveness and presence of mindful meditation to almost anything.

When swimming, notice where you merge with your environment, how the water and air feels on your skin. As you move, scan your body for places holding tension.

The same applies to walking and other activities - it's about being in your body and fully alive to the experience.

Regular seated meditation makes it easier to access this state and, likewise, mindful movement will benefit your seated practice.

## MEDITATION CAN MAKE LIFE BETTER, BUT PERHAPS NOT IN THE WAY YOU THINK

By developing awareness of our thought patterns - and understanding that, unlike facts, thoughts are changeable and transient - we can build compassion for ourselves and others, live more in the moment and less on autopilot. Letting go of how we think life could or 'should' be can lead to greater contentment.

Meditation doesn't remove pain or big emotions but, in time, it may become easier to sit with those feelings and understand their roots.

## Resources

### TO SUPPORT YOUR PRACTICE:

- **Insight timer**  
An app that offers an online meditation community and a simple way of timing and tracking meditation sessions, as well as guided meditations and yoga. Free and paid version available.

- **Calm**  
Guided meditations, relaxation soundscapes, sleep stories and much more. Free and paid version available.

### TO EXPLORE MEDITATION AND MINDFULNESS:

**Pema Chodron** (Pema's book 'How to Meditate' is a great place to start)

**The work of Thich Nhat Hanh and his community**

**Yoga Like Water** (free resources including meditation and breathwork)

## A simple mindful meditation practice

- Sit comfortably.
- Set a timer, perhaps 5-10 minutes.
- Scan through your body - how are you feeling physically and emotionally?
- Adopt a soft, downward gaze.
- Breathe slowly through your nose, using the breath as an anchor to return to. Follow the breath's journey through the body, observing the physical sensations it creates.

### Two techniques:

- **Breath counting** - number each breath cycle (one to ten, then reverse) or a slow count as you inhale and exhale. Extending the exhales can feel calming.
- **Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh's mindful breathing**: "Breathing in, I know I am breathing in. Breathing out, I know I am breathing out."

When thoughts arise, label them as 'thinking' and return to the breath, doing the same with 'emotions' and 'sensations.' Noticing physical sensations that follow particular thoughts can help build self-understanding.

As you finish, shift your focus externally and reconnect with your environment.

Consider making notes on your experience and how it impacts your day. Some sessions will be frustrating or disappointing - be kind to yourself, it's all part of the practice.

Consistency is key. Regular short sessions are better than sporadic longer ones.

