

## Meditation for Beginners



from Erin Curtin, Wellness Coordinator

Meditating can be a simple way to enhance physical and emotional well-being. Practicing meditation has been shown to improve quality of sleep and stress management skills, increase patience and tolerance, reduce negative emotions and lower resting heart rate and blood pressure. Some research suggests that meditation may help manage symptoms of anxiety, chronic pain, IBS, and heart disease. There are different types of meditation including:

**Guided Meditation:** Easy to do and good for beginners. A type of meditation led by a teacher in person, or via audio/video, who gently guides you into a meditative state.

**Mindfulness Meditation:** Combines meditation and mindfulness (a mental state that involves being focused on “the now”) to be able to acknowledge and accept your feelings, thoughts, and sensations without judgement.

**Mantra Meditation:** Can be especially helpful if your mind tends to wander a lot during meditation. A mantra is a word or phrase you repeat during meditation as a tool to help release your mind. Some people choose mantras that double as affirmations. Transcendental meditation is a silent form of mantra meditation developed in the mid-1950’s by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. It is taught by a certified teacher.

**Visualization/Guided Imagery:** Focusing on a peaceful mental image to calm the mind and body.

*All you need is a chair and a quiet place. Start with 3-5 minutes, setting a timer if you like.*

### How to start:

**\*Breathwork:** When you lengthen your exhale, you activate the parasympathetic nervous system which helps bring a sense of calm.

- Sit in a chair with a straight back and gently close your eyes.
- Breathing, inhale for a count of 2 and exhale for a count of 4.
- Or you could simply extend your exhalation. There is no need to keep count.
- Take a deep breath, and slowly exhale. As you breathe out, notice your muscles begin to relax and release tension.

**\*Body scanning:** By scanning from feet to head, you bring awareness to each part of your body, allowing you to let go and relax.

- Sit in a chair with a straight back and gently close your eyes.
- Start by taking a few slow, deep breaths.
- Bring your attention to your feet.

- Notice any sensations present in your feet, not labeling them as “good” or “bad”, “pleasant” or “unpleasant”- simply observe.
- Breathe deeply and relax your feet.
- Repeat this process as you move up through your legs, hips, torso, hands, arms, neck, face, and head.
- Focus on the breath to release any pain, tension, or emotions.

**\*Mantras:** Affirmations, and calming words or phrases can help focus the mind.

- Sit in a chair with a straight back and gently close your eyes.
- Start by taking a few slow, deep breaths.
- Choose a word or phrase that is calming to you. “I am safe”, “here, now” or “peace” are good examples.
- You can speak your word or phrase out loud, or quietly repeat it in your mind.
- You can pair the phrase with your breath, for example inhale the word “here” and exhale the word “now”.

**\*Visualization:** Using imagery to calm and focus your mind and body.

- Sit in a chair with a straight back and gently close your eyes.
- Start by taking a few slow, deep breaths.
- Imagine yourself in a peaceful place such as a loved spot in nature, sitting on a beach, a vacation destination or lush garden.
- Visualize the details and imagine the sounds, scents, feelings (e.g., gentle breeze or warm sun on your skin).
- Relax in your scene for several minutes.

**\*Remember: It is normal to lose attention during meditation. If you notice your mind wandering, relax and allow stray thoughts to float away. Accept that you will lose focus and just start again.**

*“Letting go means simply releasing the thoughts and ideas that our minds get in the habit of attaching themselves to, including the ideas of yesterday and tomorrow. Letting go is not hard or harsh. We should let it be easy and gradual. Our habitual way of reacting makes us feel as if we have to go on a journey with every thought that comes, or that we have to wrestle them to the ground to control them. That isn’t true at all...The moment that we become aware that a thought has taken form, we just relax and allow it to pass. We just notice the thoughts and we return to our breath.”*

*- Buddhist teacher angel Kyodo williams*

**\*Free Meditation apps:** Healthy Minds Program, UCLA Mindful, Smiling Mind, Mindfulness Coach.