

'The only thing you need is your own mind': how to start meditating

Level 2: Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. How much do you know about meditation? Read and check (✓) the true statements.

1. ☐ Research shows that meditation can reduce stress in the body.
2. ☐ To meditate properly, you must clear your mind of all thoughts.
3. ☐ To work best, you must meditate for at least 30 minutes.
4. ☐ Regular meditation practice can help you focus and pay better attention.
5. ☐ Mindfulness meditation practices may help you sleep better.

b. Discuss the statements with your classmates. Which ones surprised you? Which do you want to learn more about? What else do you know or want to know about meditation?

2 Key words

a. Write the correct words from the wordpool to complete the definitions below. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

wondering

failed

rewards

mindfulness

spine

perfectionism

relationship

upright

benefits

awareness

complex

balanced

1. _____ are helpful and useful effects that something has or advantages that something gives you.
2. When you _____ at something, you did not succeed in what you were trying to achieve or were expected to do.
3. The way in which two things are connected or how two or more people feel and behave toward each other is a(n) _____.
4. _____ is knowing that something exists and is important.
5. _____ are things that you are given because you have done something good, worked hard, etc.
6. Something _____ involves a lot of different but related parts.

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7. _____ is asking yourself questions or expressing a wish to know about something.
8. The practice of being aware of your body, mind, and feelings in the present moment, thought to create a feeling of calm is called _____.
9. Something _____ is in a vertical position or straight up.
10. Keeping all the different things or parts of something in equal or correct amounts or giving all sides equal attention and consideration means they are _____.
11. The _____ is the line of bones down the center of the back that provides support for the body and protects the spinal cord.
12. _____ is the wish for everything to be correct or perfect.

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. You might have to change the form of the word.

1. _____ of mental health issues has grown among young people.
2. The new yoga studio had a(n) _____ system and every tenth class was free.
3. A(n) _____ diet includes many different types of food from all food groups.
4. _____ sounds good because we want things to be 100 per cent correct, but it cannot be achieved.
5. Children _____ so much about the world, so they ask why.
6. During meditation, keep your neck and _____ straight.
7. He has always had a close _____ with his grandmother.
8. Meditation may seem _____, but it's easy — just breathe.

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Meditation isn't about perfectionism or blocking thoughts, experts say – the goal is to develop 'a balanced awareness'

Madeleine Aggeler
02 January, 2025

- 1 Meditation has many benefits. Studies have found it can help with anxiety, depression, insomnia and even gut health. So why isn't everyone doing it all the time?
- 2 "I often hear people say: 'I tried meditation once and I failed. I couldn't stop thinking,'" says Sharon Salzberg, a meditation teacher and author.
- 3 But an empty mind is not the goal of meditation, Salzberg says. The goal is to change our relationship to thoughts so that we can develop "a balanced awareness".
- 4 Sitting with our thoughts can be challenging. According to a 2014 study from the University of Virginia, many people would rather get a light electric shock than sit alone in silence for 15 minutes.
- 5 But there can be rewards. When we meditate, "our physical brains change," says Dr Richard Davidson of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. With regular meditation, the complex networks in our brain can change and have long-lasting effects, Davidson says.
- 6 **Start small**
- 7 "Meditation doesn't require any special setting," says Davidson. "The only thing you need is your own mind."
- 8 There is no set amount of time one should meditate. It can be five minutes or 15. The best meditation is the one you'll do. Salzberg recommends setting an alarm so you don't spend your meditation wondering how much time has passed.
- 9 "Don't try to sit for 20 minutes, and then it's so hard that your body and mind get tired, and you don't want to do it the next day," says Kaira Jewel Lingo, a meditation and mindfulness teacher and author.
- 10 **Sit comfortably**
- 11 Sit comfortably and allow your back to be upright. This could be in a chair or on a pillow on the floor.
- 12 Your hands can rest in your lap or on your thighs, says Lingo. "Check that your neck and head are balanced over your spine, so you're not leaning forward, or back, or off to the side," she says.

- 13 Your eyes can be open or closed. If they are open, focus on a spot on the floor a few feet in front of you.
- 14 **Notice how you feel**
- 15 As you begin, feel your feet on the floor, your seat in the chair and anything else. Whatever you find, Lingo says, let it be.
- 16 Notice your thoughts and emotions. If you feel anxious and distracted, that's fine. "We're not trying to change anything with mindfulness," Lingo says. "We're just noticing."
- 17 **Focus on the breath**
- 18 Notice the feeling of your breath. "Just the normal, natural breath," says Salzberg.
- 19 To do this, find the place in your body where the breath is most noticeable to you. This could be the nose, chest or abdomen.
- 20 "Bring your attention there, rest, and see if you can feel just one breath," she says.
- 21 **When your thoughts wander, begin again**
- 22 Your thoughts will wander. But that's not a sign of failure, Salzberg says. In fact, it's the whole point. When lose focus, let go of whatever you were thinking about and return to noticing your breath.
- 23 "If you have to let go and begin again seven billion times in those few minutes, it's fine. That's the skill we're developing," Salzberg says.
- 24 **If you want to make it a habit**
- 25 If you like meditating and want to continue, there are lots of resources available. Try to find books, podcasts, YouTube videos, apps, or in-person and online communities. There are also different types of meditation to try, like walking meditation, transcendental meditation and loving-kindness meditation.
- 26 Whatever you try, experts say that as you move forward, a guide can be helpful.
- 27 "We need to be reminded that [meditation] is not about blocking thoughts. It's not about some weird model of perfectionism," Salzberg says.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. According to the article, what are some of the benefits of meditation?
2. What does Sharon Salzberg say is and is not the goal of meditation?
3. What did the 2014 University of Virginia study show about people's preferences?
4. According to Dr. Richard Davidson, what happens to our physical brains when we meditate regularly?
5. Why does Salzberg recommend setting an alarm when meditating?
6. What advice does Kaira Jewel Lingo give for time limits for meditation beginners?
7. How should someone sit during meditation, according to the article?
8. What should you do with your eyes during meditation?
9. As you settle into meditation, what should you notice and what should you do about it?
10. According to Salzberg, what should you do when your thoughts wander during meditation?

4 Key language

a. Unscramble the zero conditional sentences. Put the *if* clause first.

1. are open / of you / let your gaze rest / if / your eyes / on a spot / in front

2. if / seven billion times / to let go / in those few minutes / it's fine / you have / and begin again

3. there are / if / meditating / and want to continue / resources available / you like / lots of

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b. Rewrite the sentences from task a. Put the main clause first.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements about meditation.

- 'You should sit in meditation for 20 minutes a day, unless you're too busy. Then you should sit for an hour.' (Sukhraj S. Dhillon)
- 'Do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the future, concentrate the mind on the present moment.' (Siddhartha Gautama)
- 'You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf.' (Jon Kabat-Zinn)

6 In your own words

a. Do some research about meditation. Choose one of the three types mentioned in the article (loving-kindness, walking, transcendental) or another one that interests you. Answer these questions.

- How is this form of meditation usually practised?
- Where is it usually practised?
- What kind(s) of breathwork are included?
- Is there a common script or mantra associated with it?
- What are some tips and/or resources for beginners?

b. Report your findings to the class and share the facts you learned, as well as your opinions. Include facts and information that support your research. Give reasons to support your answers.