

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

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

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

1. ☐ Scientific research has shown meditation can reduce stress hormones in the body.
2. ☐ To meditate properly, you must clear your mind of all thoughts.
3. ☐ Meditation requires at least 30 minutes per session to be effective.
4. ☐ Regular meditation practice can help improve focus and attention span.
5. ☐ Mindfulness meditation practices may reduce insomnia and improve sleep quality.

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.

nostrils	executive functioning	tingle	distracted
strayed	align	insomnia	settle in
inevitable	mindfulness	noticeable	abdomen
shock	perfectionism	gaze	

1. To _____ is to arrange two or more things in a straight line or in their correct relative positions.
2. A(n) _____ is a slight prickling or stinging sensation, usually felt under the skin.
3. If you are unable to concentrate because your attention is drawn to something else, you are _____.
4. Something that can be noticed or observed is _____.
5. Something that is unavoidable or certain to happen is _____.
6. If you _____, you have moved away from the place where you should be, without meaning to.

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7. _____ is the condition of being unable to sleep over a period of time.
8. A sudden flow of electricity through a part of the body, causing pain and sometimes death is a(n) _____.
9. Mental processes that help you set and carry out goals, such as working memory, problem solving and reasoning, are a group of skills known as _____.
10. A(n) _____ is a long look, usually of a particular kind.
11. To _____ is to become familiar with somewhere new, such as a new house, job or school, and to feel comfortable and happy there.
12. The part of the body below the chest that contains the stomach, bowels and other organs is called the _____.
13. The two openings in the nose through which air moves when you breathe are called _____.
14. The practice of being aware of your body, mind and feelings in the present moment, thought to create a feeling of calm is called _____.
15. _____ 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. I was sitting for too long, and my foot _____ when I stood up again.
2. There was a(n) _____ change in her mood after she started meditating regularly.
3. During a yoga practice, the instructor may ask you to focus your _____ to help you balance.
4. _____ sounds good because we want things to be 100% correct, but it cannot be achieved.
5. Javier was suffering from _____ because of the stress from his new job.
6. Don't touch that old lamp. The wires are loose, and it may _____ you.

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7. Since you unpacked, have you _____ your new apartment?
8. In this breathing technique, you close one _____ and then the other.
9. Be sure you don't _____ from the hiking trail, so you stay safe.
10. They say that death and taxes are the only things that are _____.

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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 instead of being swept away by them, 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 receive a mild electric shock than sit alone in silence for 15 minutes.
- 5 But there can be rewards. "When we engage in this practice, our physical brains change," says Dr Richard Davidson, founder and director of the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. With regular meditation, the complex networks in our brain that control our emotional responses and executive functioning can be rewired. "This enables meditation to produce effects that are enduring," 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. Whether it's five minutes or 15 minutes, 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 in a way that's comfortable and allows your back to be upright. ("You don't have to be in a pretzel pose," says Salzberg.) 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 – wherever is most comfortable, says Lingo. The rest of your body should be aligned. "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, let your gaze rest on a spot on the floor a few feet in front of you.

14 Notice how you feel

- 15 As you settle in, feel your feet on the floor, your seat in the chair and any other sensations in the body.
- 16 "There may be tension, an itch or a tingle," says Lingo. Whatever you find, she says, let it be.
- 17 Notice your thoughts and emotions. If your mind is racing or you feel anxious and distracted, that's fine. "We're not trying to change anything with mindfulness," Lingo says. "We're just noticing."

18 Focus on the breath

- 19 Notice the feeling of your breath. "Just the normal, natural breath," says Salzberg.
- 20 To do this, find the place in your body where the breath is most noticeable to you. Salzberg suggests this could be at the nostrils, chest or abdomen.
- 21 "Bring your attention there, rest, and see if you can feel just one breath," she says.

22 When your thoughts wander, begin again

- 23 Your thoughts will wander. It's inevitable. But that's not a sign of failure, Salzberg says. In fact, it's the whole point of meditation. When you notice your focus has strayed, just let go of whatever you were thinking about and return to noticing your breath.
- 24 "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.

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- 25 **If you want to make it a habit**
- 26 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 that are convenient or appealing. There are also different types of meditation to try, like walking meditation, transcendental meditation and loving-kindness meditation, in which you send thoughts of goodwill and kindness to yourself and others.
- 27 Whatever kind of meditation you pursue, experts say that as you move forward with your practice, a guide can be helpful.
- 28 “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 reveal 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. is racing / that's fine / your mind / if / anxious and distracted / or you feel

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

4. 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. _____
4. _____

c. Write four personalised sentences using the zero conditional.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

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)

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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.