

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

Level 1: Elementary

1 Warmer

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

1. ☐ Research shows that meditation can lower the stress in the body.
2. ☐ To meditate properly, you must clear your mind completely.
3. ☐ To work best, you must meditate for 30 minutes.
4. ☐ Regular meditation can help you focus and pay better attention.
5. ☐ Meditation 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.

empty

mind

relationship

benefits

setting

1. _____ are helpful and useful effects that something has or positive things that something gives you.
2. Something _____ does not have any things or people in it.
3. The way two things are connected or the way in which two or more people feel and act toward each other is a(n) _____.
4. A(n) _____ is the place or environment where something occurs.
5. The _____ is the part of a person that makes them able to be aware of things, to think and to feel.

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failed

mindfulness

comfortably

wander

notice

6. The practice of being aware of your body, mind and feelings in the present moment, thought to create a feeling of calm is called _____.
7. Something that happens _____ happens in a way that makes you feel relaxed or is pleasant to wear, sit on, etc.
8. To _____ someone or something is to see or hear someone/something or to become aware of them.
9. To move slowly away from a fixed point or place is to _____.
10. When you _____ at something, it means you did not succeed in what you were trying to achieve or were expected to do.

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

1. He has always had a close _____ with his grandmother.
2. During meditation, try to calm your _____.
3. Regular exercise has many health _____.
4. Don't _____ off the hiking path. It could be dangerous.
5. He was worried about _____ the exam.
6. Sit _____ because it will be a long meeting.

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

Madeleine Aggeler
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- 1 Meditation has many health benefits. So why isn't everyone doing it?
- 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, Salzberg says. Meditation's goal is to change our relationship to thoughts.
- 4 When we meditate, "our physical brains change," says Dr Richard Davidson of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. With regular meditation, those changes can last for a long time, Davidson says.
- 5 **Start small**
- 6 "Meditation doesn't require any special setting," says Davidson. "The only thing you need is your own mind."
- 7 There is no set amount of time to meditate. It can be five minutes or 15. The best meditation is the one you'll do. Salzberg recommends setting an alarm.
- 8 "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.
- 9 **Sit comfortably**
- 10 Sit comfortably and keep your back straight. This could be in a chair or on a pillow on the floor.
- 11 Your hands can rest in your lap or on your thighs, says Lingo. Check that your neck and head are straight.

- 12 Your eyes can be open or closed. If they are open, look at a spot on the floor in front of you.
- 13 **Notice how you feel**
- 14 As you begin, feel your feet, your seat and anything else. Whatever you find, Lingo says, let it be.
- 15 "We're not trying to change anything with mindfulness," Lingo says. "We're just noticing."
- 16 **Focus on the breath**
- 17 Notice your breath. "Just the normal, natural breath," says Salzberg.
- 18 To do this, find the place in your body where you notice the breath. This could be the nose, chest or belly.
- 19 **When your thoughts wander, begin again**
- 20 Your thoughts will wander. But that doesn't mean you failed, Salzberg says. In fact, it's the whole point. Let go of the thought and return to your breath.
- 21 "If you have to let go and begin again seven billion times in those few minutes, it's fine," Salzberg says.
- 22 **If you want to make it a habit**
- 23 If you like meditating, there are lots of resources. Try to find books, podcasts, YouTube videos, apps, in-person groups and online communities. There are different types of meditation, like walking, transcendental and loving-kindness.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. According to the article, what does meditation give people?
2. What does Sharon Salzberg say is the goal of meditation?
3. What does she say is not the goal of meditation?
4. According to Dr. Richard Davidson, what happens to our brains when we meditate regularly?
5. What is the time limit for meditating?
6. What advice does Kaira Jewel Lingo give 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 begin to 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. Complete the sentences with the zero conditional.

1. _____ your eyes _____ open, _____ at a spot on the floor in front of you. (If / be / look)
2. _____ you _____ to let go and begin again in those few minutes, it _____ fine. (If / have / be)
3. _____ you _____ meditating, there _____ lots of resources. (If / like / be)

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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 worry about 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 breathing techniques are used?
- 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.