



## **Meditation Exercises**

**Introduction:** Exercises that focus the mind can provide a welcome respite from our usual high level of mental activity. Setting aside time each week or each day to meditate can rejuvenate or relax us, bring insight into our mental state, and provide relief in times of high stress. These techniques are not connected to any religion, but can be incorporated into a spiritual practice if so chosen. The following suggestions offer options for meditation that are easily incorporated into our busy lives: try them out upon waking up, when you have a few moments during the day, or to help you fall asleep.

**Nurturing Positive Thoughts, Letting Go of Unhealthy Patterns:** *A simple and effective technique when you only have a short amount of time, or when you need a boost.*

Sit or stand tall but comfortably. Feel feet connected to floor. Release shoulders away from ears. Raise arms and breathe in as you focus on taking in a positive thought or feeling. Press hands down as you focus on letting go of something unhelpful. Examples: breathe in energy, breathe out weariness; breathe in hope, breathe out despair; breathe in confidence, breathe out fear. Option: End with an affirmation or message of self-acceptance, e.g. "I'm trying my best, and I'll get through this challenge."

**Visualization Meditation:** *Use for self-calming before or after a difficult event, or when stress is high.*

Sit or lie down. Take a few deep breaths. Close your eyes and visualize a place—real or imaginary—that feels peaceful, restorative, safe, and beautiful. What do you see? What can you hear close by and far away? What fragrances do you smell? What textures can you feel under your feet and touch with your hands? Explore your special place for as long as you wish, breathing in the qualities of the place.

**Seated Breath Meditation:** *This technique can help you:*

- *Enhance mental clarity*
- *Be fully present in the moment*
- *Understand your inner emotional state*
- *Feel grounded*

Find a quiet place. Light a candle if you wish. Sit tall in your chair, feet on the floor; or sit comfortably on the floor. Align your spine, shoulders over hips, as if suspended from above. Hands can be in your lap or on your thighs, palms up, or press palms together at heart. Feel your posture as both rooted and energetic. Eyes can be closed or softly focused. Mouth is closed, tongue relaxed. Be sure you can breathe comfortably.

Center your awareness on your nostrils, where the air enters and leaves your body. Notice your breath. Begin counting your breaths, returning to 1 every time a thought intrudes. When thoughts come in, notice them, then let them go. Bring yourself back to your physical body, to the breath coming in and out.



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**Meditation for Deep Relaxation:** *Good for relaxing before sleeping.*

Lie down comfortably on the floor or bed. You may wish to put something under your knees for support.

**Physical Release:** Let your arms relax, palms up, by your sides. Flex back toes of one foot, stretching the arch. Flex back foot of one leg, stretching the calf. Engage leg muscles and lift leg slightly off the ground, then release gently back to floor. Repeat with your other leg. Stretch fingers of one hand taut, spreading them far away from each other, engaging hands and wrists. Slowly tighten into a fist. Engage arm muscles and lift entire arm slightly off the ground, then release gently back to floor, with palm up. Repeat with your other arm. Tighten glutes (butt muscles), raising butt off floor slightly, then release gently back to floor. Lift shoulders from floor, then release gently back to floor. Lift head slightly off floor, then release, setting it down gently. Tighten all the muscles of face to the point under the nose, as if you just bit into a lemon, then release. Stretch out your face muscles, opening mouth wide, and then relax.

**Mental Release:** Beginning at the feet again, scan your body mentally. Bring your mind to each toe, and release all tension. With the touch of your mind, let each joint, tendon, muscle, and bone relax. Continue moving up your body, relaxing the tops of your feet, soles, ankles, calves, knees, thighs, hips. Go slowly, focusing your mind on each part, willing it to relax. Move to fingers, hands, wrists, all the way up forearms to elbows, upper arms and shoulders. Move up your torso, including spine, abdomen, ribs, chest, back, collarbone. Start at the base of your neck and relax throat, face, ears, scalp, hairline. At each point, let your mind's focus loosen tension in the deepest parts of your body all the way up to the surface levels. Breathe comfortably.