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Meditation made easy

There are so many different ways to approach meditation so that it works for you, and techniques don't always involve sitting in silence for hours on end. By **Amanda Bown**



Practising meditation can bring a sense of inner peace and the ability to 'live in the moment', but achieving a heightened state of self-awareness is something that many people find difficult. We tackle common problems that many people experience when they try to meditate.

'I can't stop my mind racing'

When trying to meditate for the first time, many people begin to notice just how many loud thoughts run through their mind at one time.

Anne Sadhana Goulston, a meditation expert in Australia, suggests: 'Try to still the body first by tensing your body from feet to your crown, release, and repeat a few times. Focus on your breath, and when thoughts come into your mind, try to experience them as radio waves, let them go and re-focus on your breath, letting any thoughts float away.'

Victoria Wills, a meditation and hypnotherapy expert, agrees. 'For people with racing minds, meditations are a wonderful way to slow down and enjoy the moment. The trick is to treat all your thoughts as if they were bubbles floating through your mind, so you can see thoughts, allow the bubble to stay intact, and let it float past you.'

'Don't engage in thoughts, just acknowledge the thought, and let the bubble float past you. For instance if you begin to think about your shopping list, let a bubble with the list float through your mind, and don't think about writing the shopping list!'

'When I am alone with my thoughts, I tend to feel a bit down and depressed'

Trying to expel negative thoughts and voices is difficult; it can be frightening to focus inwards rather than outwards. Goulston suggests that trying short meditations can take the pressure off. 'Start with 10 minutes. If that's too long, just stop what you're doing and be absolutely still. Focus on your breathing, sit upright comfortably, tilt your pelvis forward slightly, keeping your back erect.'

Rajesh Ananda, of the Foundation for International Spiritual Unfoldment, says: 'Often we don't like our thoughts, or being alone with ourselves, as floods of thoughts in our minds can reflect our inadequacies, problems and weaknesses. However, after just a few days of meditation practice, we become less self-conscious and busy thoughts calm down. It's like taking a holiday from your mind!'

'After a short period of meditation, we can feel stronger, as you dive deep within yourself, you can draw on the reserve of strength that resides naturally within us, at the deeper recesses of the mind. We can face daily challenges from a new perspective, and actually like ourselves more!'

'I just can't sit still, I fidget nonstop!'

Aim to be sitting comfortably and not still for hours on end, or in positions you just can't stay in comfortably, no matter how hard you try!

Goulston encourages us to 'start by listening, feeling and noticing whatever your senses offer you. Try and enjoy being still and silent. Begin to notice a freedom in silence - a sense of expansion. Allow any thought to flow without any judgment.'

Wills suggests trying the following: 'Sit with your feet on the floor and imagine roots growing out of the soles of your feet, reaching down into the earth, going as far and wide as need be. Allow your breathing to become deep and measured, when you feel completely grounded, find a comfortable place to sit, and continue with your meditation practice.'

'Reaching Zen, or mindfulness, seems unattainable - any ideas on how to do it?'

Philip Underwood, a meditation and life-coach expert (www.philipunderwood.com), gives us the lowdown. 'Mindfulness is a technique used by many people to enter a meditative state-it's not a state itself, only a step on the way.'

'We can define mindfulness as a state of awareness, from our thoughts, actions and feelings; silently observe these thoughts and sensations without actually thinking about them. If the goal is to be mindful, all we have to do is stay in the moment, be totally aware of thoughts, feelings, and experience them without engaging in rational thinking processes.'

'Mindfulness isn't tricky to do, simply observe the moment without giving it meaning. When we do this, we open to the possibility of going beyond rational thinking, and our mind moves into a deeper state of awareness.'

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