

Caleb Griffith

A Guide to Meditation for the Uninitiated: The How and Why of it.

Demystifying this ancient technique that will help you center your life and quiet the busy world around you.

"Meditation is not about stopping thoughts, but recognizing that we are more than our thoughts and our feelings." - **Arianna Huffington**

Meditation is enormously helpful to your mindfulness, which also helps every part of your life. This is also a stigmatized practice and many people do not know how to do the basics. In this article I hope to demystify this practice and begin to show what meditation is. It's not hard but it's also not very easy. It just takes commitment.

Items you might want to help meditation:

Yoga Matt.
Yoga Rug.
Sand Timer.
White Noise Machine.
The Headspace App.

I. How to perform the techniques to meditate.

Performing meditation requires several steps. They are quite easy but it just takes a little patience. All you need to do is find a comfortable position, and follow these steps to clear your mind.

A. Taking stock of how your body is feeling.

An important part of starting this process is the step that is simply taking stock of your body and the way it feels. Imagine that you are being scanned in an MRI. Starting at the top of your head, slowly move down the length of your body until you reach your feet. While doing this, take note of how your body feels. If it hurts or you have any aches. You don't need to fix this, just take note of how your body is feeling before the meditation begins.

B. Meditating by breathing.

The easiest way to begin meditating is by focusing on your breathing and on the movement of your diaphragm. While you are breathing in, begin counting. The breath in is one and the breath out is two. Continue this until you hit the count of ten and once you do begin the count over again. Feel your diaphragm contract and expand. Eventually, you'll stop counting and just breathe while focusing on nothing at all. Sometimes your mind will wonder and that's okay. We'll get to dealing with distractions later on. This is the most common way of meditating, but it isn't only one.

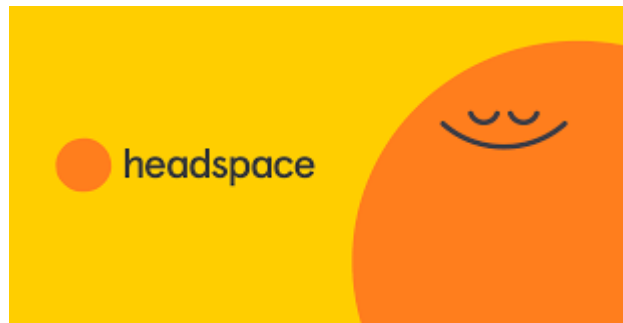
C. Meditation on the go!

I live in East Tennessee, and it is one of the most beautiful places in the world. The mountains have many great hiking paths and nature trails. In these places, you might want to gain a little mindfulness, but you need to keep walking so you're not hiking at night. This means that you can't sit down and breathe until you find your blank space. So why not try a walking meditation technique instead? There are a couple ways of doing this. Still focus on your breathing, this is the biggest tool to use to achieve this trance. While walking though you could try the technique of counting your steps. On your left foot, count one and on the right foot, count two.

The other technique is to use the "stream of consciousness" method. This is used on your hike to just describe everything that you are seeing. Describe the path, what your thinking, what you saw on tv last week. You just need to say literally anything that comes to your mind. Don't filter it and don't feel inhibited. Eventually doing this will let you enter the trance. You won't even really hear

what you're saying. It's a great way to meditate while you're centering yourself in nature.

These meditations are easy but if you need further help with anything I just mentioned, there are many resources that can help you along this journey.



One of those is a free app called Headspace.

It's free for the starter courses. They also have other lessons about sleeping and quitting smoking. Its good and if you need the help, you should check it out.

II. Distractions while meditating.

Distractions are a part of the gig when it comes to meditation, and you are going to come across them at some point. You'll be in the zone, and everything is going great but then all a sudden you realize you stopped counting, stopped being in the trance and now you're thinking about your day at work. How you handle this is important and it's something that is worth discussing as it *will* come up.

First off, know that it is okay that you got distracted. Zoning in for hours and hours, while possible, is not the point of this exercise. The point is actually in the distraction in and of itself. I know that that sounds a little counter intuitive, but it's true. The idea of meditation is to gain more control and awareness of you're mind. The whole idea behind it is that you recognize that it happens and then you make the active and conscious decision to target your mind back to where it started.

The second thing that you need to know when you start meditation is that it is not really that relaxing. When people first start out on it, they get this idea that they have to do it perfect. Then when a distraction happens, they want to fall out and stop doing it. It can even cause anxiety in these kinds of people. Just relax and go back to counting your breaths. You'll get there.

Distractions happen and learning to deal with them is key to staying focused on the goal of this subject. Like most things in your life, distractions are not the real enemy. They are merely the opportunity of the day to build your focus and resolve to stick to something new that you are trying.

III. Benefits.

In the section above this one, I mentioned that meditation is not particularly relaxing, and this is true. This is a myth, one of several about this practice. While eventually you may find this exercise relaxes you, that will be a by product of what this is actually intended to do. This idea of this is to make you gain awareness of your mind.

You will be amazed at what you realize your mind does when you start to pay attention to it. Imagine if your arm was randomly doing things all day whenever it felt like it and you didn't notice. Imagine how tired your arm would be without you ever even realizing it. Simply noticing it gives you back some of your autonomy. And then slowly working at controlling your arm will make your life considerably better.

Now take that metaphor and apply it to a different muscle, like the brain, and plug in these variables. If you ever feel like focusing is hard when you're taking a test or writing a paper or at work, it's because this world is going by fast, and it demands a lot of your attention. But like using an old school radio, you can tune to a frequency that matches your pitch.

It will also make you more present in your day to day life. Being present is one of the most underrated skills that we as a species have. It will lead to you better understanding the situations and people you find yourself around. This will lead to a more emotional fulfilling life. It will also give you the tools and the ability to see what is going on in the situations that you are in.

Say that you are trying to get a raise at work and you are going to ask your boss. Then you take note of what they look like, what kind of a day their having and you see that it's a bad one. It's not the day to ask so you wait for tomorrow when your boss has had a much better day. This is the point and reason for being present. You see more on the shoulders of your clear mind.

Mediation is not easy, but it also isn't hard. It just takes some motivation and commitment. It is not very fun, it is not relaxing and it does take a while to work. And this is an exercise were the point of it is to catch when it isn't working. With all that in mind you should absolutely consider trying this. If the first attempt doesn't kill you, keep going.

The more you put into this, the more that it will give back to you. You have the tools to make your mind sharper and more focused. You already have all that you need to have this much more emotionally fulfilling life. They are just locked up in your mind but a world that is trying to make you move so fast that you cannot focus on any one thing or else you feel like you're not doing enough.

So if the world that we live in is the jailer to the patience and the focus that will improve your life, than meditation is your crew that is pulling the jail break. Just give it a shot and learn that it will help you immensely. Meditation isn't hard, but it isn't easy either. But it is worth it.

Contributor's Note

Caleb Griffith is an English major at East Tennessee State University. He enjoys reading, writing, and trying not to stress too much. He learned how to meditate while in high school and never stopped. Griffincj@etsu.edu

Recommended Readings

Practical Meditation for Beginners: 10 Days to a Happier, Calmer You. Benjamin W. Decker.
Meditation for Beginners: Techniques for Awareness, Mindfulness & Relaxation. Stephanie
Clement.