

What is meditation?

Meditation is the practice of uncritically and non judgementally attempting to focus your attention on one 'thing' at a time and gently letting go of distractions as they inevitably come into your mind. This one 'thing' is usually called the object of attention and may be a word, a phrase or simply being mindful and aware of the sensation of breathing. Meditation is stilling the noise level in our mind and attempting to settle our mind into silence. The aim is to simply be in the here and now and not be distracted by worries about the past or concerns for the future. However, when these occur the aim is to be non-judgmental and to accept and acknowledge that this is happening and then to come back to the object of attention.

This fact sheet is not meant to take the place of proper instruction for meditation, but rather provide some key points to keep in mind as a meditator.

Practical strategies

It is helpful to have a suitable environment – comfortable temperature, good ventilation, low lights, and to be free from distractions, so take the phone off the hook and educate the people you live with that you are meditating and you don't want to be disturbed. Make sure that you are wearing comfortable clothing, so loosen any tight belts, undo constricting buttons and take off your shoes. It's best not to meditate within a couple of hours of eating as your body is busy digesting food and it is also best not to meditate just before you want to go to bed and sleep, as meditation usually has the effect of revitalising and re-energising you.

Your mental attitude

When you start to meditate, and as you continue, have a positive expectation that you CAN meditate, rather than believe it is something only a few can do. However, let go of expectations of what meditation should feel like or what should happen during meditation. Have a passive and non judgemental attitude to what happens during meditation. Most people have a positive effect immediately, but sometimes a person might feel alarmed, because this is the first time they have sat still and become aware of the content of their mind. Also know that each meditation may feel quite different.

Meditation is a choice

Don't make meditation a chore that you HAVE to do, because you will end up feeling resentful or guilty. Cultivate an attitude of anticipation and look forward to your quiet times.

Some people like to create a special meditation place in their home and decorate it in such a way that induces a sense of calm and peace. For example, decorating a small table by draping a beautiful cloth over it and placing on it a beautiful symbol, lighting a candle or burning incense.

Effects of meditation

Remember that there are many wide-ranging and positive effects of meditation. Besides feeling calmer and more peaceful after we meditate, within a very short time meditation will influence our physiology and reduce tension and stress. We become calmer and happier individuals and more able to deal with life's challenges as they come along. Our concentration improves and we are more able to detach from feelings such as worry, anger, anxiety or feelings of low self-worth.

Obstacles in meditation

You may experience certain 'obstacles' in meditation, such as restlessness, falling asleep or being bothered by your mind chatter. Rest assured this is normal and with practice these obstacles become less of a problem. However, even for the well-practiced meditator each meditation is different and at different times they will also deal with their own obstacles. Beginner meditators usually are challenged with other obstacles, like finding the time to practise and getting into a routine. Regular daily practise is recommended even if you start off with 5 –10 minutes a day. You can build up the time as you go on. Aim for 15 – 20 minutes once or twice a day and when you are used to this, try longer meditations.

Other resources

Ideally, this fact sheet needs to be used alongside additional instruction and/or resources such as the relaxation or mindfulness audio "tools" at "thedesk" which is a free online resource which aims to support Australian tertiary students to achieve mental and physical health and wellbeing. www.thedesk.org.au

For further information contact the UNE Student Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS):

Phone: (02) 6773 2897 for a free appointment

Email: studentcounselling@une.edu.au or via [AskUNE](#)

<http://www.une.edu.au/current-students/support/student-support/counselling>