



EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MEDITATION



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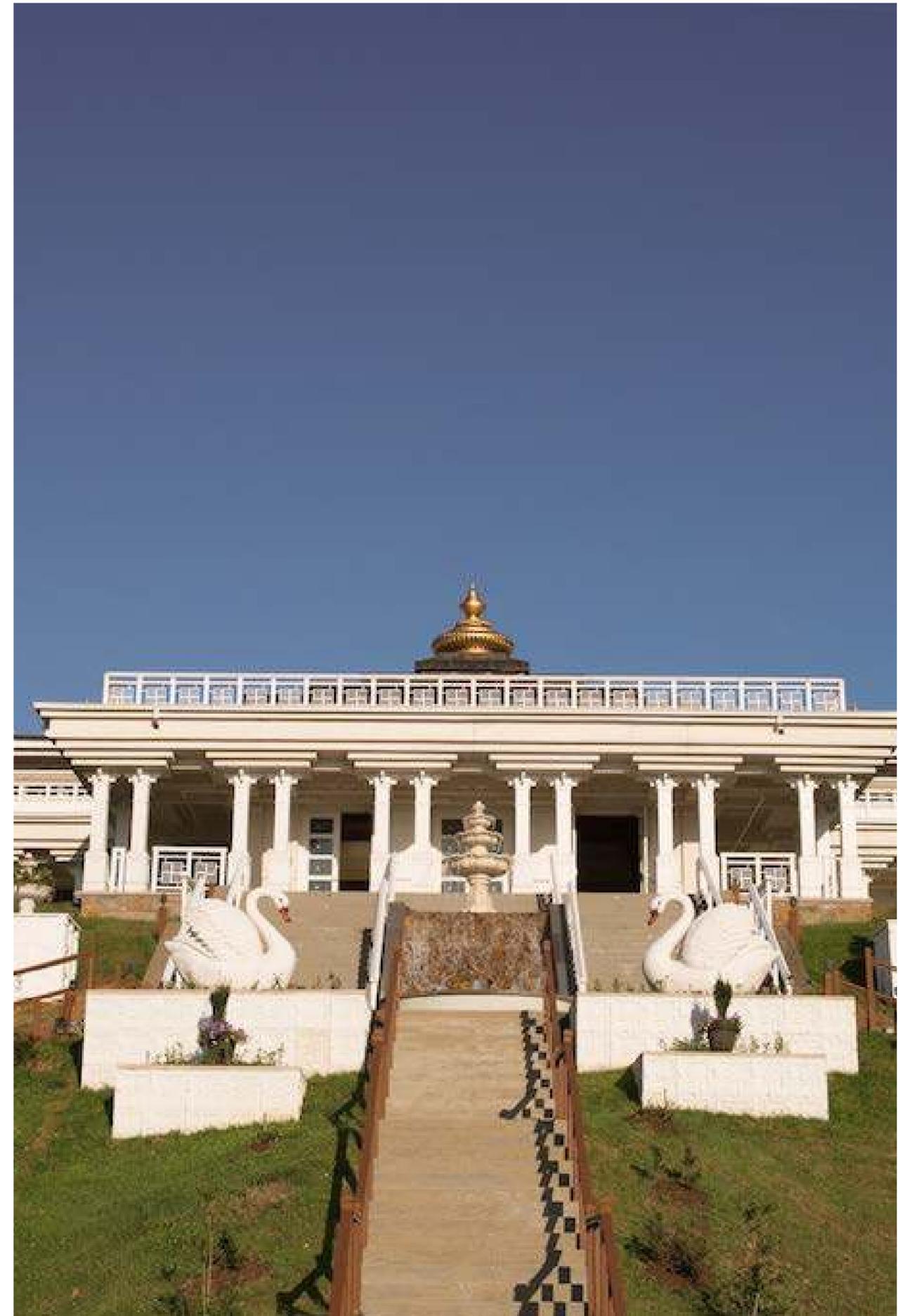
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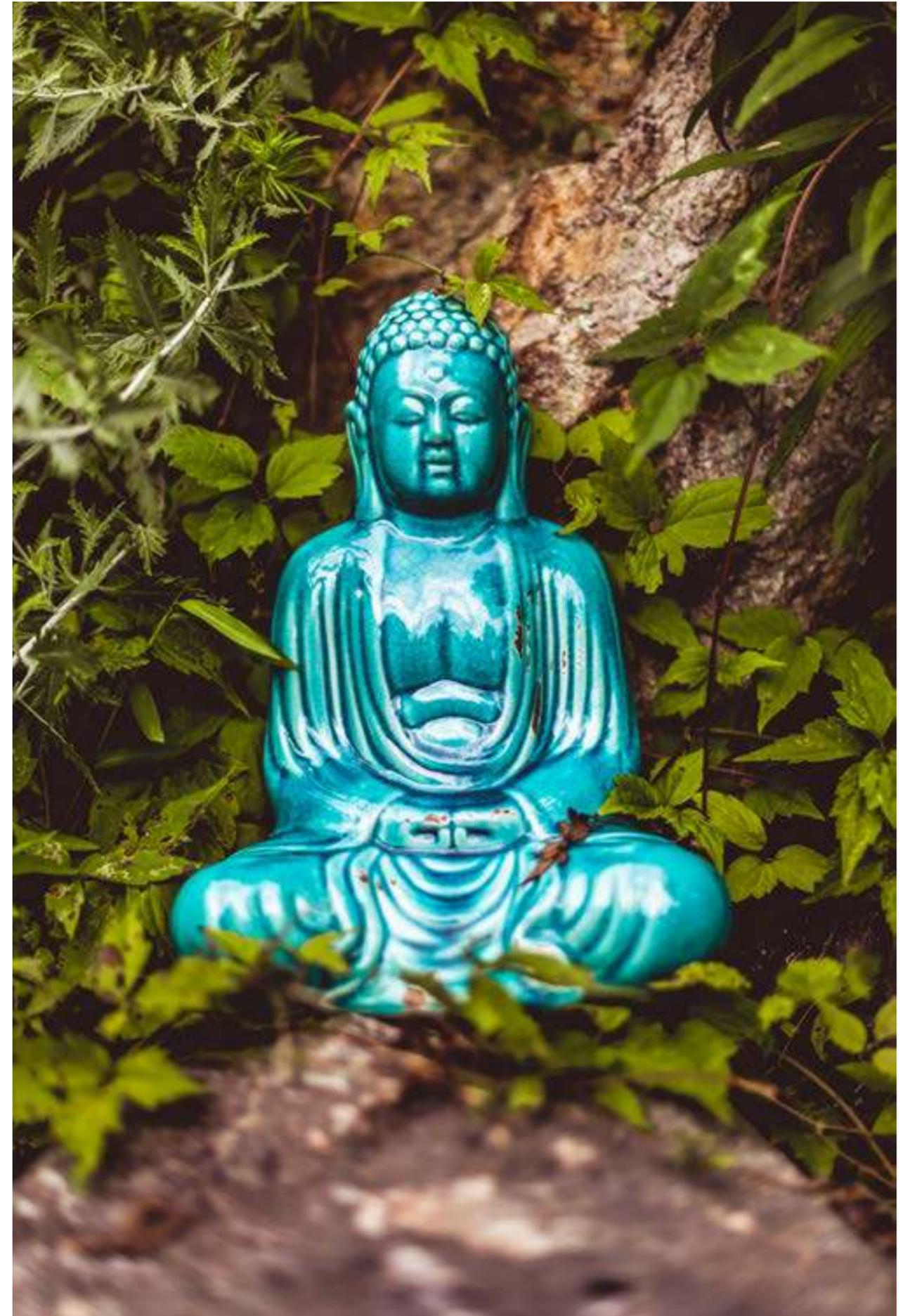
MEDITATION 101

*Today 35 million
Americans practice
meditation in some form.*

To achieve anything in the material world, you make an effort. To make money, you put effort; to stay fit, you put in the muscle work; to get into the Ivy League, you study hard; and even to do something as simple as eat, you need to pick up the fork and put the food in your mouth. We tend to take this habit of putting in effort even in our attempt to relax our mind. We are constantly trying to focus or concentrate on this object or that, or at worst, trying to still the thoughts in our mind, in the name of meditation. But unlike the material world and our body, our mind works differently. Our mind thrives on effortlessness. Meditation is a tool to calm the agitated, restless, stressed out, foggy or tired mind-effortlessly.

Spiritual teacher and founder of the International Association For Human Values, Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, who has introduced the art of meditation to millions of people across 156 countries, defines it as “the delicate art of doing nothing and letting go of all the efforts to relax into your true nature which is love, joy and peace.” Now, science also backs this understanding of meditation, where researchers say, meditation techniques that do not involve concentration, provide deeper and more meaningful rest to the mind.

But how do you meditate? What are the benefits of meditation? Is meditation as helpful as therapy? What are the reasons to meditate? How long should you meditate? What are the different types of meditations? If all these questions have crossed your mind, here is our most comprehensive guide for an intro to meditation, for you. Deadlines, arguments, ambitions, relationship issues, trying to maintain a work-life balance, or in dealing with losses and trauma—meditation has emerged as an antidote to ubiquitous stress. Today 35 million Americans practice meditation in some form, a number that was just 4.1 percent of the total population in 2012.



WHY MEDITATE?



While different forms of work out and hobbies can help you stay 'in the zone', which many compare with meditative experiences, meditation itself can lead you much deeper into your being, where alpha brain waves are active. Meditation allows for a qualitative pause in your day. What brushing is for your teeth, meditation is for your mind- a total detoxification of the daily stresses and strains that you tend to collect from life situations.

If you want to experience lightness of being, a happiness so pure and inescapable, (picture the Buddhist monks), and a way to LET GO, then meditation is a must. Meditation techniques help you relax and unwind in just a few minutes. It has been termed as a powerful fuel to increase your productivity. The reasons to meditate can be physical, mental, emotional as well as spiritual. Studies suggest, regular practice can give you the following advantages of meditation:

A FEW OF THE ADVANTAGES

- Improve our physiological response to stress
- Lowers the oxidative stress
- Reduces blood glucose levels
- Reduce risk of cardiovascular diseases, where stress is a high-risk factor
- Reduction in hormonal releases caused by stress: cortisol, corticotropin, blood lactate, ACTH, and plasma MDA
- It relaxes and de-stresses the mind
- Increases acceptance
- Boosts productivity
- Gives stability of mind
- Establishes you in the calm and peaceful state
- Helps you realize inner happiness
- Improves metabolism
- Improves mood
- Improves focus
- Enhances your sense of well-being
- Increases connectedness and empathy
- More creativity and better decision making
- Better brain health
- Better pain management
- Improved and richer relationships
- More capacity to embrace opposites



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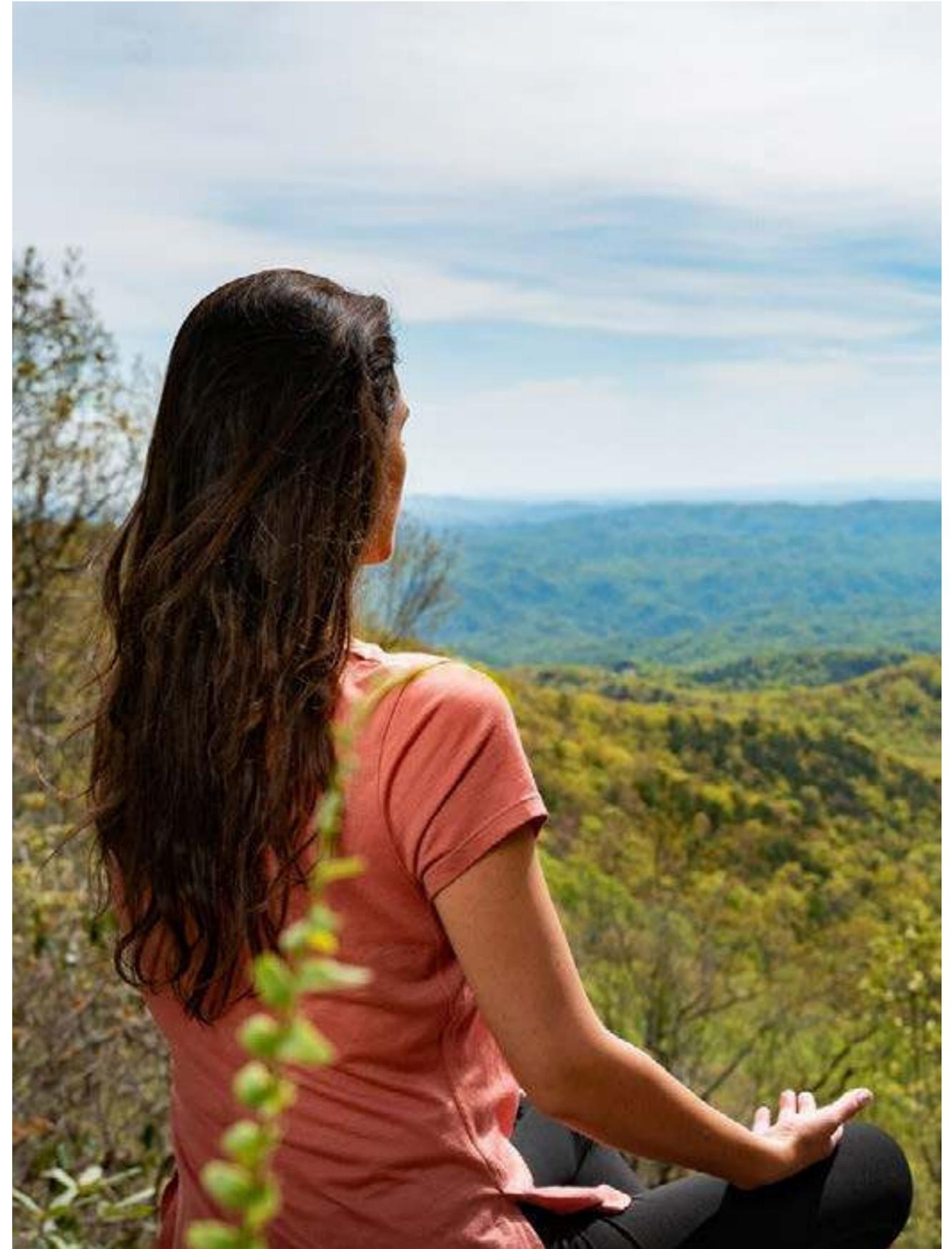


1. Pick a quiet and peaceful setting for meditation.
2. Make sure your spine is erect while sitting. Do not sit down to meditate on a hungry or full stomach; space out your meditations two hours after meals.
3. It is a good idea to begin with few light yogic stretches before sitting for meditation. Physical exercises or yogasanas remove the Rajas guna or restlessness from your body, setting the tone for a deeper meditation.
4. Take a few deep mindful breaths. Observe your breath. If you know it, you can practice pranayamas like alternate nostril breathing or ujjai (victory breath). Pranayamas prepare you for a deeper meditative dive.
5. Gently move into your meditation practice. You can have this protocol for any type of meditation that you may practice.

HOW TO MEDITATE

When you are starting off with a practice like meditation, it helps to pick a practice that is simple to learn, easy to do and does not take much time. For novices of meditation, breath, for example, can be a useful segue into a meditative state. Meditation can also be mantra based, which makes it effortless to mediate with the help of a mantra syllable, like the Sahaj Samadhi meditation technique.

The best time to meditate is Brahmamurata or the twilight hours when the sun rises. Ideally you should find time to meditate twice a day, for 20 minutes each time.



OBSTACLES TO MEDITATION

As you move into your meditation, you may have some thoughts or questions—what’s next? Is this it? Am I supposed to be doing something with my hands or legs? When is my next phone bill due? Did I leave the lights on? Am I in the right place? Is this for me? What if I am no good? RELAX! Meditation is for everyone. Here’s what you can do to deepen your meditation and alley the distractions.

Thoughts/Worries/Distractions/Emotions Rise

There are usual challenges one faces while starting off with meditations such as

Restlessness You may feel twitchy just as you are instructed to sit still. You may feel like moving your limbs, scratching or itching there. You may feel a strong urge to open your eyes too.

Sleepiness If you are trying to sit for meditation after a big meal, or after not having slept well enough, it may be difficult to tell meditation from sleep.

Lack of Self-Acceptance The idea of meditation is to go closer to your highest self, connect with the Self. But it is nearly impossible to do that if you are self-critical. We never like going closer to someone we don’t like or like less. Guess what? The rule applies to yourself too! The biggest hurdle in meditation can be not having a healthy self-worth. If you are constantly trying to second guess your experience in meditation or if you are thinking, you are no good at this, or that you are not meant for this, you may be hindering yourself from going deeper.

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Pain A lot of us are new to the idea of ‘not doing’. It may be that the first few times you sit for meditation, you could experience pain in some parts of the body and have physical sensations that have gone unnoticed before, simply due to lack of awareness. Now that you are becoming more aware of your body-mind complex, it is possible you experience more subtle pains.

Negative Emotions Fear, anger, anxious thoughts, worries, sadness- you may experience host of these emotions in the initial sessions. Many people share experiences about crying in meditation without particular triggers. But it is perfectly normal that they surface in the beginning of a meditation practice.

MANAGING THE MIND

Here's what you can do to tackle all of the above obstacles:

Observe the Thoughts

Simply observe them come and go without getting drawn into them. Again and again keep becoming aware of the thoughts. You'll notice overtime, the frequency of your thoughts reduce.

Accept, Do Not Resist

The tendency of our mind is, what we resist, persists. So the more you want to be thoughtless, the more thoughts are likely to show up! The best way to deal with this is to accept the thoughts and emotions, good or bad that come up during your meditation practice. Do not fight them or try to push them away. Sometimes, these thoughts or emotions are part of the cathartic process or emotional purging as you delve deeper into your consciousness.

Meditation is Not Concentration

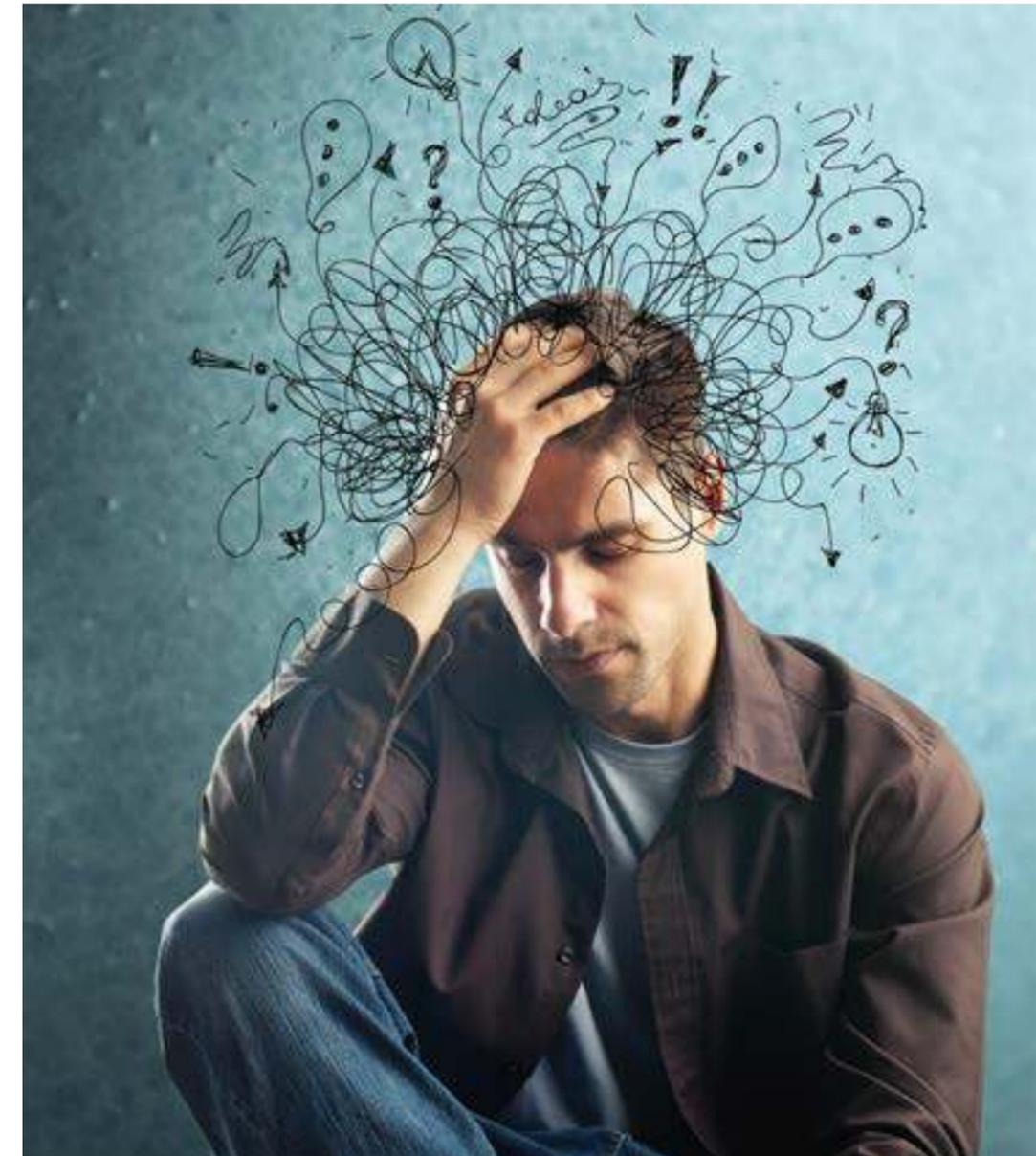
Know that meditation is not about concentration. It is in fact de-concentration. For those 15 minutes, set aside all your obligations and planning.

Drop the Baggage of Identities and Ambitions

Before settling in, tell yourself that for these the next 15 or 20 exclusive minutes, 'I am nothing, I do nothing and I want nothing'. This initial dharana or concept acts like a vehicle to take you into a stable meditative state.

Mind Your Diet

If you have had heavy meals earlier in the day, you may struggle to stay awake during meditation. You can feel the difference in the quality of your meditation when you have a diet that is light on the stomach including fruits and salads.



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TIPS FOR CREATING A HOME MEDITATION SPACE

Ancient disciplines of self-awareness believed, the more reverence you show for the practice, the more it rewards you with its secret gifts. While it is important to be regular with the discipline of meditating every day, it is equally valuable to create a space of deep reverence, comfort and freshness for your practice. You can personalize it with just the right lighting, essence and sacredness.

1. Pick the quietest corner in the house.
2. Make sure the room is airy and if it is not too cold, open the windows for some fresh air and light to come in.
3. For a practice to flower, it is important to give it due respect and sanctity. So make sure your meditation space is clean and uncluttered.
4. Enter the meditation space with a sense of honor and reverence.
5. Bring in elements of nature into the space—a potted plant or flowers can do or even light incense or aromatic candles will work.
6. Have a small table to place your beads or scriptures on.
7. Have a piece of you there. That essentially means, things, spiritual or otherwise, most personal to you—let them adorn the little table. It could be an image of Devi or Christ or whoever it is that you believe in.
8. Make sure you spread out a clean yoga mat every day for your practice. Ideally, do not use the mat for any purpose other than meditation.



TYPES OF MEDITATION

“Meditation is one practice that is better learned under the guided supervision of a meditation teacher or instructor rather than self-teaching.”

You May Need an Instructor

Meditation is one practice that is better learned under the guided supervision of a meditation teacher or instructor rather than self-teaching. An instructor can remind you to become aware of the mind again and again. You may also undergo experiences that an instructor can help you make sense of. Once you have a few hours of practice behind you, you may not need this nudge from the instructor.

To learn about languages or sciences, you need a teacher. Similarly, the subject of the mind is a deeply complex one, where you will need a teacher to guide you through the uncharted territory of your inner life. Having said that, it helps to know a little about the different types of meditations you have available to you.

The goal of meditation is to put you back in your most natural state. Various schools of meditation use various tools to enable this journey. Some use chants or mantras, others use specific thoughts, yet others ask to focus on specific external objects or visualize a certain setting, for the mind to settle into the rhythm of our being. The proof of the pudding, though, is in the eating.



SUDARSHAN KRIYA YOGA (SKY) MEDITATION

The SKY meditation is a powerful rhythmic breathing technique being practiced by over 450 million people all over the world. It involves deep breathing practices followed by a cyclical breathing technique cognized by Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. The practice ends in an effortless meditative state.

Sahaj Samadhi Meditation

‘Sahaj’ in Sanskrit means effortless and ‘Samadhi’ is an equanimous mind. The technique uses a sacred sound to move the mind step by step through thoughts, worries and regrets to a deeper more blissful state.

Vipassana Meditation

A 10-day residential meditation protocol where participants follow strict physical and mental discipline, learn the technique, and practice it over the course of the program.

Transcendental Meditation

This popular technique is a mantra based technique that encourages an individual to focus during meditation.

Mindfulness Meditation

A meditation technique rooted in Buddhism, it encourages a practitioner to improve one’s present moment awareness.

Walking the Labyrinth

Here, you walk into the center of a labyrinth while taking one’s attention within. One experiences quietness on reaching the center of the labyrinth and comes out of the labyrinth the same way.

Reading Meditation

An activity like reading can become a meditative experience if done with the right awareness. When you are totally in the moment, absorbed in the written word and become the experience, you are already checking all the boxes of a good meditation. Ideally for reading meditation, pick up a book of spiritual wisdom such as the Bhagvad Gita, Bible, or Ashtavakra Gita that house the essential wisdom to help us lead peaceful and aware lives, taking us notch closer to our higher self. When you read such texts meditatively, the knowledge effortlessly becomes a part of your consciousness.

Walking Meditation

At our Art of Silence Retreats, a favorite among the participants is the walking meditation. Here, participants are encouraged to walk amidst the nature in total silence with full awareness.

Mantra Chanting

Another unique way to dive into oneself effortlessly is by using powerful chants or Mantras. “Mantras are impulses or rhythms of the consciousness. They create vibrations in the spirit. Their effects, influence, method, and mode of working are all a mystery,” says Bhanumathi Narasimhan, a senior Art of Living Sahaj Samadhi meditation pioneer, who has taught the practice to millions across the globe, “In Sanskrit, it is said, Manana trayate iti mantra. Mantra is that which saves you from repetitiveness. A repetitive thought is a worry. Mantras help to free you from your worries.”

The vibrations from chanting mantras get absorbed into human consciousness, relieving the stress and worry from the system, It gives you a calm, peaceful state instantly.

Meditations for Specific Objectives

Meditation is a complete practice in and of itself that give you any number of desired results by simply making you aware. So if it is a habit you are trying to quit and unable to (like smoking, drinking, drugs, substance addiction) or if it is certain qualities in your consciousness that you wish to manifest (loving-kindness, compassion, inner joy, openness, or acceptance), or if you are trying it to heal an illness like cancer, heart disease, migraine, or diabetes, today you will find meditations customized for these specific goals, too.



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Mudra Meditation

Mudra stands for 'seal', 'gesture', or 'mark'. In yogic sciences, they facilitate the flow of energy in particular direction. Mudras, when practiced along with pranayamas, settle the mind down instantly into a thoughtless state. Mudras are healing modalities that involve the tips of the fingers and placement of the fingers in a certain pattern to give the desired outcome which can be balancing doshas, energizing the body and mind, pain reduction, increasing blood flow to particular parts of the body, improving digestion, mitigating migraine, among others.



“Mudras, when practiced along with pranayamas, settle the mind down instantly into a thoughtless state.”



Ayurveda says, our body is made up of five elements—fire(Agni), Air(Vayu), sky(Aakash), earth (Prithvi), water(Jal). Each finger is known to correspond to these five elements.

Thumb—Fire (Agni)
Index finger—Air (Vayu)
Middle finger—space or ether (Aakash)
Ring finger—Prithvi (earth)
Little Finger—Water (Jal)

How to Practice These Mudras

You can practice them any time of the day or night.

1. Sit in padmasana (lotus pose), Sukhasana (easy pose), or Vajrasana, keeping your spine erect and shoulders loose.
2. Hold each mudra for 13–15 breaths and then move on to the next one.

USE, TOOLS, & BENEFITS OF MEDITATION



Stress Relief

Drilling a \$300 billion deep hole in the pockets of American companies, stress has been officially indicated as a hazard at workplace. Also, 110 million people die as a result of stress each year and 43% American adults suffer from health problems due to stress. Meditation fundamentally changes the way we are wired to act in the face of stressful situations be it at the workplace or at home or school. Meditation while keeping stress out of our lives, also closes the door on host of lifestyle disorders caused and worsened due to stress like hypertension, diabetes, anxiety, chronic inflammation, skin diseases like Psoriasis, and depression.

Breathing to Calm, Soothe, Relax

Many meditation techniques use breath as a tool to bring the stressed, anxious or emotionally charged mind-body complex to a calm and centered state. Yogic breathing techniques like Pranayamas such as Bhastrika (bellows breath) or alternate nostril breathing and ujjai (victory breath) regulate the breath and slow it down as we bring our attention to the breathing patterns. Just this act of observing our breath and the way it moves between nostrils can be meditative and instantly energizing. Focused breathing cultures our mind to keep coming back to the present moment.

Service

Founder of the International Association of Human Values, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar says, “Only a lit candle can light another one. Only a happy and stress-free mind will look to serve.” The benefit of meditation not just extends to your own well-being, but it plays an important role in opening up your heart to a more kind, loving existence, where you want to give, from the space of joy and inner happiness you have received.

Grounding

Life is full of opposites. There are favorable and unfavorable events going on around us all the time. What we tend to do is, flow with the energy of these events, getting too ecstatic when things are favorable or feeling completely bogged down when things are not. Meditation grounds and anchors you to your center in a powerful way, that none of these opposites can shake you off that inner seat of calm and stability.

We often come across people in our lives who inspire us by the way they handle chaos and stress with unshakable calm. Guess what? The quality to be calm and hold one's nerves in opposite situations of excitement or stress, happiness or sadness, can be easily cultivated with meditation. Meditation offers you the ability to de-clutter your mind, find your inner rhythm, do more with less time without stressing, break away from habits that cause self-harm, worry less and think clearly.

“The benefit of meditation not just extends to your own well-being, but it plays an important role in opening up your heart.”



Helps Control ADHD Symptoms

Meditation is training for the mind to be more attentive, to be more present in the now. A research done by scientists from Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston and Swarthmore College, showed that even a 10 minute meditation practice improved the executive attention span in novices. Meditation is known to expand one's prefrontal cortex in the brain, which is responsible for focus, planned action and controlling impulses. Yet another study concluded that meditation was effective in reversal of patterns of mind wandering and worrying.

Panic Attack and Anxiety

Panic attacks and anxiety are closely tied to the habit of uncontrolled worrying. Neurologically speaking, anxiety is a cognitive condition that affects our emotional response to perceived uncertainty. Research done at Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center found that with meditation people with generalized anxiety were able to better regulate their emotional response. Brain imaging showed, relief in anxiety from meditation were linked to activation of key parts of the brain like anterior cingulate cortex, prefrontal cortex and anterior insula, which are responsible for executive action and controlled worrying.

Even with job related anxiety in high pressure environments like in health care, meditation has proven to show positive results.

Release Anger

Anger is bad for our nervous system simply because it activates our sympathetic nervous system, where our breath is shallow, heart rate is faster and blood pressure is up. Sympathetic nervous system becomes active in a fight or flight mode. A recent study published by researchers at University of Kansas suggested that a single session of meditation reduced physiological response to anger even in people who were meditating for the first time.



“Even with job related anxiety in high pressure environments like in health care, meditation has proven to show positive results.”

Reduces Overthinking

This one's simple. Meditation overtime reduces the number of thoughts you have. It applies a break to the habit of mindless overthinking. The way this works is, meditation enables you to observe your own mind without judgment. Once your mind has settled in meditation, firstly you are likely to have fewer thoughts and secondly you will be able to stay unaffected and uninvolved from the few thoughts that arise. This way, it saves your prana or life force from getting drained by overthinking.

Financial Stress

Financial stress can put pressure on your mental health in the most insidious ways. It can squeeze your prana, enthusiasm and ability to function with a clear mind by causing you to overthink every expense and worry too much about how to make ends meet or how to meet your financial obligations. This stress when it builds up in the mind-body complex can lead to physical illnesses too, causing further financial problems. To break this vicious cycle between financial stress and health, meditation is indispensable.

Meditation gives you the ability to weather financial storms or for that matter any storm in life that can be mentally and emotionally debilitating. It empowers you with a certain detachment, calmness and foresight. When you are not doing well financially, you will need a tool like meditation to help you think clearly about the future course of action and not let anything affect your productivity. It broadens your vision of life beyond the temporal nature of money to the real essence of life.



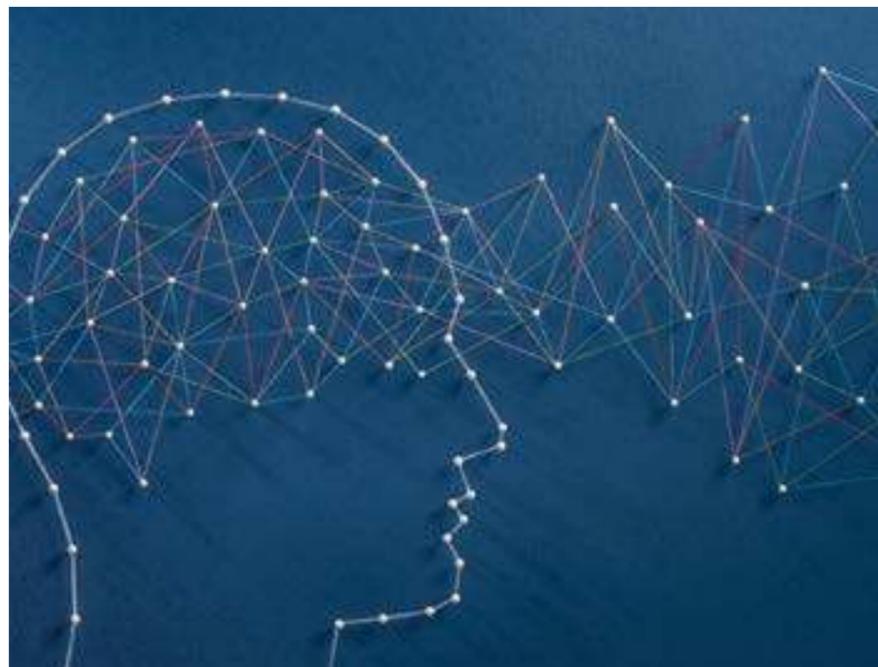
Meditation for Sports

In a focused activity like sports, the ability to stay the course, give your best and act swiftly comes with a premium. Meditation can give you these abilities. An athlete or sportsperson who practices meditation regularly will have more present moment awareness. When a sport demands your best performance in those 90 minutes, present moment awareness is key. As any professional sportsman would know, a sport is emotionally charged with the presence of audiences cheering and jeering all the time and pressure to perform well. One needs to have strong control over one's emotions in order to win games. There are specific focused attention meditation techniques mentioned in the ancient vedic texts that can help increase one's attention span and sharpen focus.

Deeper Rest than Sleep

You get a deeper rest from a short 20 minute meditation than sleep. The rest you get from such a meditation is equal to four hours of undisturbed sleep. Research says, those who meditate can manage to stay productive by sleeping for just five hours.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND MEDITATION AND ALPHA BRAIN WAVES



The rising popularity of meditation demanded a rigorous investigation into what potential meditation truly holds for increasing human wellbeing, and what does relaxation translate to in terms of improved brain function. Such a collaborative study was carried out by researchers at Sydney University and Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) to understand the changes in electrical brain activity during meditation. Use of EEG on meditators showed

- Abundant theta waves in frontal parts of the brain (that monitor mental processes) indicating deep relaxation.
- Increase in alpha waves in posterior parts of the brain. They occur in meditation rather than just a state of relaxation, which indicates awareness along with rest. Increase in alpha waves happen when the brain is taking a break from intentional activity but with mildest activity in the form of awareness.
- Meditations that do not require concentration affords a much deeper relaxation to the brain, according to researchers. This is because these types of meditations simply make an individual more aware of the spontaneous wandering mind instead of trying to push them away by way of concentration, which requires some mental effort.
- Fewer beta waves during meditation explain how meditation stops a chattering mind. These waves are present when the brain is engaged in planning or solving a particular problem or working towards some goal. Reduction in Beta waves indicate the brain is able to pause planning and analysis during meditation.

THE VALUE OF SILENCE

Very often we go on vacation and come back feeling more tired. But if you could take a few days off each year to stay with yourself totally, in the midst of nature, breathing fully, accompanied with guided silence, the quality of your meditations can gain tremendous amount of depth.

The result is that you will come back to your routine more grounded, more centered, and feeling positive, ready to take on the world. You find an unshakable joy that cannot be tarnished by external circumstances.

The Art of Silence Meditation Retreat A STRUCTURED RETREAT

There are many retreats that will let you find your silence in an otherwise peaceful natural environment. But you may still feel lost and not know how to use the silence and be with it, especially if you are new to meditation. The Art of Silence Retreat provides just the right atmosphere for you to sink deeper in your meditations, helping you clear out the mental chatter. Here all your needs are taken care of, so you can exclusively focus on going deeper into yourself through meditative silence. Your day during the course of the retreat is carefully crafted to give you a transformative experience. It is the most ideal vacation for body, mind, and spirit.



EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MEDITATION

