

The Physical Approach to Meditation

Many of us are familiar with the image of Buddha sitting cross-legged in the lotus position. The idea of sitting in that position seems too uncomfortable and, for some, simply impossible. Don't give up yet!

Luckily, meditation does not have to be conducted in that position. There are actually several different ways to practice meditation, including by walking around. The following are some ideas to help you get started.

A. Before you begin your meditation practice, you must decide where you would like to meditate. Meditation can be done anywhere, for any length of time so you need not find one place to practice. You can set aside however much time you can at whatever location works for you. It is helpful, however, to think ahead so you have some ideas and a plan about where you will meditate. As you consider your schedule, will you have quiet time at home before work? A break at work when you can close your office door and silence the phone? Quiet time before going to bed? Consider the environment in which you are living and working and see when and where you can take a few minutes to yourself.

B. Once you have decided where and when you would like to try meditating, commit to making it a consistent practice. This is a commitment you are making to yourself and your own well-being. It will benefit you, your employer and your family so choose to do this regularly (whatever that means to you). It may initially seem hard to follow-through on a consistent practice because this is true with most new habits we are trying to learn.

FOR A STATIONARY MEDITATION:

1. Most people tend to approach meditation from a sitting position, and this is the position most often recommended. Sitting helps prevent people from becoming so relaxed they fall asleep. Relaxation to fall asleep is different from the relaxation one feels with meditation. Meditation often leaves people feeling centered, calm yet energized, and focused. Some people sit crossed-legged on the floor, with their hands in their lap and palms facing up. This is certainly one option. Others will sit in a comfortable chair, also with their hands in their lap and palms up. The hand position is really up to you; this is just what many people do. If sitting up is physically uncomfortable for you, feel free to sit in a recliner or to lay down wherever it works for you.

2. Many people close their eyes when they meditate but some find this uncomfortable. If you would rather keep your eyes open, it is recommended that you find something to focus on. Some ideas include a spot on the wall or carpet, a candle flame, a rock or flower you like, or any other appealing object (family photo, piece of artwork, etc.). Put your focus point anywhere that your eyes can rest on easily.

3. Attempt to breathe slowly and as deeply as is comfortable for you. If you notice you are taking many quick, shallow breaths attempt to consciously slow them down and make

them deeper. To regulate their breathing, some find it helpful to focus on the sound of a clock's second hand and count several seconds for each inhale and exhale. Focusing and slowing one's breathing in this manner often helps individuals feel more calm and relaxed.

FOR A MOVING MEDITATION:

Sitting is not a prerequisite for meditating. Many cyclists, kayakers and runners describe a mental state during their activity that is akin to meditation. Their physical activity focuses their minds and calms their bodies.

There are individuals for whom a sitting meditation is too uncomfortable. It may be too physically demanding due to a physical injury or due to a restless disposition. It is still possible for these folks to benefit from a meditation practice with a walking form of meditation.

Begin with steps A and B from above.

3. A walking meditation can be conducted just about anywhere you can move. Some have used their office stairwell; some have walked in their garden; some have a favorite walking route or trail, and some go up and down a quiet hallway in their home, at the office, or at a hotel when traveling. Walking a labyrinth is a form of walking meditation. Consider your different options.

4. Doing a walking meditation obviously precludes closing your eyes so you must focus your attention in a different way. In this form of meditation people focus their attention inward, paying attention to the physical sensation of walking. During this meditation walk slowly and consider how your weight is distributed across your feet, at what point do you transfer your weight from one foot to the other, what is your process of taking steps (lead with the knee, strike with the heel or middle of the foot first, etc.), do you stand up and lead with your chest or hunch forward and lead with your chin, etc. We take walking so for granted we stop noticing these things.

For anyone who is unable to do a walking meditation but is still mobile, you can go through the same process. Simply adjust what you are focusing on in your mobility that fits your unique situation.

WHEN IN YOUR MEDITATION SESSION OVER?

It takes time to build up "endurance" in meditation. Begin with a few minutes and increase your time spent meditating at a pace that is comfortable for you. Many people try to build up to at least one hour a day but for others this is not feasible or desired. The point is for the meditation to benefit you on a regular basis. For a quick break from a busy day, one can see benefits from as few as five minutes of focused calm.