

# Meditation 101

*In the classical yoga tradition, hatha yoga is practiced as preparation for seated meditation. So over time, you might naturally find yourself drawn inward toward more contemplative practices. ~ Claudia Cummins*



To give meditation a try, sit comfortably, set a timer for 10 minutes, and explore one of the following strategies. And consider yourself forewarned: Meditation is a delightfully simple practice, but that doesn't mean it's easy!

Just sit. Commit to doing nothing more than sitting quietly and watching what happens. Don't pick up the phone, don't answer the doorbell, don't add another item to your to-do list. Just sit and observe the thoughts that arise and pass through your mind. You will likely be surprised by how difficult it is to sit quietly for 10 minutes. In the process, though, you may learn something important about the qualities of the restless mind and the ever-changing nature of life.

Listen to the sounds of life. Close your eyes and tune in to the sounds percolating both within and around you. Open your ears and adopt a receptive attitude. At first, you'll likely hear only the most obvious noises, but over time, you'll discover new layers of sounds that you had previously tuned out. Challenge yourself to observe what you hear without clinging to it or resisting it. Notice how the world feels more alive as your awareness of the present deepens.

Practice bare attention. Notice the raw sensations of the present moment—feelings of warmth and coolness, hardness and softness, pressure and ease. Which parts of your body are in contact with the earth? How does the shape of the body shift with each inhalation and exhalation? How does your experience change over time? Cultivating an awareness of the present moment will foster a more serene and attentive mind, one that is able to settle into the here and now.

Follow the breath. Attach your mind to the breath. While you're breathing in, note that you're breathing in, and while you're breathing out, focus on the exhalation. Don't manipulate the breath in any way; simply watch it with your mind's eye, just as you would follow a tennis ball bouncing from one side of the court to the other during a particularly engrossing match. When you find that your mind has strayed, as it inevitably will, gently refocus it on the breath and begin again.

Use a mantra. Choose a favorite word, phrase, prayer, or fragment of a poem, and repeat it slowly and softly. Let its rhythm and meaning lull you into a quiet, contemplative state of ease. When you notice that your mind has wandered off to other thoughts, simply redirect it back toward the words you've chosen as your touchstone and rededicate your awareness to them.

Practice kindness. As you sit quietly, focus your inner attention on someone you know who might benefit from an extra dose of kindness and care. In your mind's eye, send this person love, happiness, and well-being. Soften your skin, open the floodgates of your heart, and let gentle goodwill pour forth.

*Claudia Cummins practices happiness and teaches yoga in central Ohio. A selection of her essays can be found at [www.claudiacummins.com](http://www.claudiacummins.com).*

