

Overcoming Stress— Meditation

There's so much in this world that we can't control, it's no wonder we have stress. But one thing you can control is your own attitude. Meditation is a gentle but powerful tool for helping you come to terms with tough times. Meditation may help you learn to savor the taste of each passing moment in your life. Meditators also report lowered pulse rates and blood pressure and slower, deeper breathing. There are many ways to meditate. The method described here focuses on posture and counting your breaths.

TIME AND SETTING

Choose a quiet, dimly lit room (if possible) for your first sessions. Many people like to meditate first thing in the morning or right before bed. When you become accustomed to meditation, you may find you can do it in the middle of a busy office. Start with five minutes of daily meditation and gradually work up to 20 or more minutes.

- **Sit upright in a straight chair with your spine erect, your ears above your shoulders and your chin tucked in, as if there were a string attached to the top of your head.**
- **Your feet should be flat on the floor, your hands resting in your lap.**
- **Rock gently back and forth until you feel your posture is centered and balanced.**
- **Let your eyes droop nearly closed and directed toward a spot on the floor a few feet in front of you.**
- **Keep your body still, unless you need to shift because of pain or discomfort.**

If sitting is uncomfortable, you can meditate lying down. Make sure that you're in a comfortable position and that your head isn't bent at an unnatural angle. (If you meditate lying down, you may fall asleep. In fact, meditation can be used as a sleep aid.)



BEGINNING TO MEDITATE

- **Start with some deep breathing:** Inhale normally and exhale deeply, letting all the breath flow out. Pause, then inhale, letting the breath flow in naturally. Use the muscles of your abdomen rather than your chest to breathe.
- **Allow your breathing to become natural and somewhat slow, as though you were settling down to sleep.**
- **As you exhale, silently count "one."** Continue counting each time you exhale, up to 10.
- **If thoughts enter your mind and you forget to count, simply notice and dismiss the thoughts, then begin again at "one."** Do the same with sounds and bodily sensations: Simply notice and dismiss them.
- **If you wish to time your meditation, use a nonticking timer.** Or do as many Asian practitioners do: Keep time by burning a stick of incense.
- **When you're finished, rock gently back and forth before slowly getting up.**
If you find you're obsessed by thoughts of things you need to do, keep a notepad next to you and jot down these thoughts for later reference. Then you can let them go while you meditate.

A GENTLE PROCESS

Remember that meditation brings gradual change. Your family and coworkers may be the first to notice a difference. Gradually, you may find yourself getting more centered and more capable of calmly facing the stress in your life.