

# “I’ve heard meditation is very beneficial. How can it help me?”

It can be a helpful tool to reduce stress, improve your mood  
and keep you healthy.



Although there are some guidelines, meditation is a versatile tool that can be performed in a variety of methods and just about anywhere. Read below to learn about the different kinds of meditation, how they can help you, and how to start.

## What is meditation?

Meditation is a mind and body practice where you engage in contemplation, reflection and self-awareness without judgment. It has been around for thousands of years and originally practiced to deepen the understanding of life. Today, meditation is commonly used for stress relief, relaxation and improving overall health. Keep in mind that meditation is not about silencing the mind, a common misconception about this ancient practice. It’s more about noting the contents of the mind and letting them go without the need to react or create any additional context around the thoughts.

## The Meditation Umbrella

Similar to exercise, there are several types of meditation. They all share the same goal of relaxing the mind and body, but achieve that goal through different techniques.

- **Mindfulness meditation** is focused on living in the present moment, being aware and accepting each moment. In mindfulness meditation you broaden your conscious awareness and focus on what you experience during meditation, such as the flow of your breath. You can observe your thoughts and emotions, but let them pass without judgment.
- **Guided meditation**, also known as guided imagery, is the practice of being guided into placing yourself in relaxing and peaceful places. While in this state of mind, you use your senses of sight, smell and hearing to enhance the experience. Your “guide” can be a practitioner, a video or a sound recording.
- **Transcendental Meditation® (TM)** is one of the more popular forms of meditation. TM is done by finding your mantra—a peaceful word, phrase or sound—and repeating it in your head. **Mantra meditation** is very similar, but you have the option to repeat your mantra out loud, whereas Transcendental Meditation is strictly silent.
- **Yoga, Tai Chi and Qigong** are meditations that incorporate physical movement along with the breathing techniques and mental exercises that are staples of the other meditations.

No matter which meditation technique you use, try to include some of these elements in your session:

- A quiet environment
- A comfortable posture
- Focused attention
- An open attitude

## Benefits of meditation

Meditation can have physical and mental benefits. It may help control the symptoms of:

- Anxiety
- Asthma
- Chronic pain and headaches
- Depression
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Sleep issues

Meditation also can have positive emotional effects:

- Increased creativity, production and patience
- Stress management
- Increased self-awareness
- Focus on the present, instead of worrying about the past or future

Another great benefit to meditation is its adaptability. It can be practiced in most environments including your commute to work, on a walk or in bed before you fall asleep.

## How to start

If you're interested in meditation, and would like to start a routine, there are many meditation centers that have group led classes. However, if these centers are not available in your area, you can start meditating on your own by using some of these tips:

- **No time limit.** Meditation isn't like exercise, where there are recommended amounts per week and times of the day that are more beneficial than others. Meditation can be done in the morning, afternoon or at night, and can be done for as little as five minutes or up to an hour or longer.
- **Find your mantra.** As described with mantra meditation and Transcendental Meditation, a mantra can help you stay positive and focus on the task at hand. A mantra can also be a simple positive phrase: say what you are grateful for, list things that made you happy today, or hum a song that you enjoy. If you are religious, repeat a prayer of choice. Make it personal and make it positive!
- **There is no right or wrong way to meditate.** Some people consider exercise, like a walk or run, to be meditation in motion. Others find reading to be a form of meditation. There are certainly guidelines, but meditation isn't limited to sitting silently in a quiet room. Meditation is about concentration and awareness in the present moment. Your method may not be conventional, but if you find it beneficial, then it's doing its job.
- **Let your mind wander.** Although it is recommended to be focused when meditating, on some occasions, it can be helpful if you let your thoughts drift. You might find other feelings or emotions to focus on which could help your meditation sessions become more productive and focused.

For more information about meditation, visit [fallonhealth.org](http://fallonhealth.org), click on Healthwise® Knowledgebase under Quick links, and search "meditation".

