

**T**here are many reasons you might want to begin meditating. If your life feels like a traffic jam of appointments, demands, obligations and bills, meditation offers a salve for modern life.

This isn't to suggest meditation is an easy practice. Photos of people meditating often show calm, smiling faces in cross-legged positions, as if this is the only way to meditate and sitting like this for an hour or so might not be challenging.

The position you take to come into meditation is the first challenge. The second is seeking quietness of the mind. For many of us, the inability to let go of guilt or anger can prove an overwhelming barrier.

Your first meditation session may be more difficult than you anticipate, so don't be disheartened if you struggle to maintain physical stillness, or if you get caught up in distracting thoughts. This is perfectly normal and like any other discipline, meditation takes consistent practise in order for you to refine your technique and really experience the scientifically proven benefits.

#### REFOCUS YOUR FOCUS

Ultimately, fixating on a person or event that's causing you anger, grief, shame or fear isn't healthy or helpful in your meditation. However, admitting that you feel the way you

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do is a very good way to address and change it. Once you've identified the cause of particular feelings, you have a powerful choice in how you want to respond when that person, event or issue is raised. For some, it's talking about money, children, jobs, health, body or sex. These subjects can become safe once we learn to see we're in control of how we react once they arise, which enables a sense of empowerment and peace.

The goal of meditation is to develop the ability to step back from our reactions and feelings to create a sense of space between our thoughts and emotions and our genuine, true selves. In this way, we realise that we're not slaves to our minds, but able to choose what we focus our attention on and give fuel to.

#### MAINTAIN YOUR BRAIN

A neuroscientist from Harvard conducted research on those who meditate regularly, and she found that 50-year-old meditators had the same amount of grey matter (responsible for memory and decision-making) as 25-year-olds. She also found their senses of hearing, touch and taste were enhanced.

The 50-year-olds had been engaged in an eight-week course, so it doesn't require a long time to see measurable benefits. The meditators committed to 40 minutes of meditation at home daily, but you don't need to start with a major goal like this.

#### SET UP YOUR SPACE

You might begin with a 10-minute meditation every morning or evening at the same time in the same place. Try to find somewhere quiet where you won't be disturbed and avoid music, loud noise or uncomfortable temperatures. Wear loose, comfortable clothing that won't distract you.

#### MEDITATION TIPS

- 🌸 Dress comfortably in loose clothing that won't cause you distraction.
- 🌸 Find a quiet, safe space for your practice.
- 🌸 Acknowledge thoughts and emotions, but don't focus and fixate on them.
- 🌸 Try to breathe slowly, rhythmically and deeply.
- 🌸 If thoughts are too loud and frustrating, try repeating a mantra (like "I am calm, I am quiet").
- 🌸 Notice all of your senses: what do you hear? Is the air cool or warm? Where do you feel tense?
- 🌸 Start with a shorter session and gradually increase the length of time.
- 🌸 Use an app like Headspace or Smiling Mind for guided meditations.

Close your eyes and focus on your thoughts and feelings. What's distracting you and chewing up all your mental energy? Can you also recognise that dealing with these feelings can wait for another 10 minutes while you focus on being fully present, right here and now?

Then you can concentrate on your breathing and the fact that you're grounded on a solid foundation and you're safe. There's no need to breathe in a particular way or sit in a position that isn't comfortable. Perhaps lying down is better for you, or sitting on a chair or a pillow.

While each of us will have varying practices that reap different results, what unites us all is that meditation has proven benefits for mental and physical health. There's no better time to start than right now. *fw*

# FINDING *inner* PEACE

Meditation can help you deal with the dramas of everyday life, but learning how can prove a challenge.

■ CAT WOODS

