Meditation

Summary

- **just chill**
  meditating is acknowledging and observing whatever happens - pleasant or unpleasant - in a relaxed way.

- **no ‘no thoughts’**
  the goal of meditation is not to empty the mind, but to observe the present moment non-judgementally.

- **open**
  this gives insight into how the mind really works, reducing attachment, letting us relax more deeply...

- **microscope**
  ...transforming the mind and using it as a device to explore itself and the nature of reality.

Ideal Posture

- imagine a string lightly pulling up your head
- mentally alert, still
- shoulders relaxed, dropped and back
- tongue on roof of mouth
- eyes closed / 10% open
- breathe naturally through the nose
- lock chin
- chest up and out

- relaxed but erect
- comfortable

- also good
Types of Meditation

Object of Concentration

**Meditation Name**

Alternative name

Simple, condensed instructions on how to practice the technique

**Concentration**

Focused attention

Hold attention on a primary object, usually your breath. Mentally note the upward movement of your abdomen as 'rising', downward as 'falling'. That's it!

**Mindfulness**

Open monitoring

Watch your thoughts, let them come and go, without reacting, judging or holding on.

**Attending**

Open monitoring

Concentrate while carefully naming thoughts, sensations and other mental processes and distractions.

**Tradition of Origin**

- Buddhism
- Many

**Loving Kindness for Self**

*Metta bavana, cultivation of love*

Acknowledge whatever you're feeling. Playfully extend loving kindness to yourself by silently expressing feelings like: 'May I be happy/healthy/loved' etc. Maintain this flow of intention.

**Silent Gratitude**

Visualization

Imagine the face of someone you feel grateful to in great detail and silently thank them. Repeat for 4-5 people.

**Loving Kindness for Others**

*Metta bavana*

Picture someone you respect and love. Send a stream of *metta* (loving kindness) towards them using silent, suitable words. If a feeling of happiness arises, absorb yourself into it.

**Walking**

Feel every sensation in your feet while slow walking - contact, rolling, lifting etc. Add attending and name every distraction. Add loving kindness and extend metta to everyone you see.

**Belly**

*Kath, hara, ton t'ien*

Just focus on the sensation of the breath in the belly as it rises and falls.

**Three-Part Breath**

Long deep

First fill the abdomen with air, then expand the chest, then lift ribs and collar bone. Exhale in reverse.

**Breath of Fire**

*Agni pran*

Rapid rhythmic breaths through the nose. Exhale explosively by contracting anus, inhale by relaxing abdominal muscles.

**Circular Breathing**

Inhale from the base of your spine up to the base of your neck. Exhale down the back of your spine.
**belly**  
_koṭha, hara, tan t’ien_
Just focus on the sensation of the breath in the belly as it rises and falls.

**three-part breath**  
_long deep_
First fill the abdomen with air, then expand the chest, then lift ribs and collar bone. Exhale in reverse.

**breath of fire**  
_agni pran_
Rapid rhythmic breaths through the nose. Exhale explosively by contracting anus, inhale by relaxing abdominal muscles.

**circular breathing**  
_____  
Inhale from the base of your spine up to the base of your neck. Exhale down the back of your spine.

**sensing loop**  
_body scan, body contemplation_
Feel into the sensations in your right foot and then work up around each segment of your body - lower leg, knee, thigh, hip, hand, arm, shoulder - in a loop.

**zen**  
_zazen, ‘just sitting’_
Counting your breaths (1 for inhalation, 2 for exhalation) up to 10. If your mind wanders, gently go back to 1. Just sit like this.

**microcosmic orbit**  
_____  
Use the breath to circulate energy through an oval ‘microcosmic’ orbit. Start at the throat, end at the forehead.

**transcendental**  
_TM_
Silently, repeat a given, single, rhythmic sound-phrase (mantra) over and over again.

**mantra**  
_____  
Chant a single, rhythmic sound-phrase (mantra) over and over again. Examples: ‘Haum Mani-Padme-Om’, ‘Sa-Ta-Na-Ma’, ‘Sabbe Satta Sukhi Horu’, ‘So Hum’ (I am), ‘Many’

**eating**  
_metta bhavana, cultivation of love_
Take twenty minutes to eat 3 raisins. Savour every detail: the look, the anticipation, the chew, the taste, the swallow.

**analytical**  
_rushen, self-Inquiry_
Sit with a deep question in your mind. ‘Who am I? is a good one. Explore who is thinking, hearing, seeing, wondering. What happens in the immediate moment as you ask this question?  
_Drogchen (Tibetan Buddhism)_

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**Common Hindrances**

- **laziness**  
  _not meditating regularly or putting meditation off until later_

- **sinking**  
  _fading of concentration, a feeling of dullness, sleepiness_

- **drifting**  
  _restless flightiness of mind, creating excitement or anxiety_

- **stray thoughts**  
  _random mental phenomena like interference on a radio_

- **trying too hard**  
  _over-focussing or trying to control restricts & tightens the mind_
Qualities of Mind Developed
in Eastern elemental terms

- **space**: open, spacious, empty
  - tranquil
  - calm, still

- **air**: clear, sharp, perceptive
  - agile
  - light, quick-witted

- **fire**: warm, tolerant, positive
  - confident
  - self-assured, proficient

- **water**: pliant, receptive, flexible
  - malleable
  - strong, workable

- **earth**: steady, concentrated, centred
  - upright
  - straightforward, direct

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The Effects of Meditation / Mindfulness
summarising the science

**COGNITIVE**
- better visual discrimination
- reduces age-related brain atrophy
- improves memory
- enhances creativity
- boosts general IQ

**PHYSICAL**
- improves cardiovascular health
- alters brain structure
- boosts the immune system
- reduces blood pressure
- reduces pain sensitivity
- reduces drug sensitivity
- reduces ageing
- reduces inflammation

**EMOTIONAL**
- reduces anxiety
- lessens stress
- eases depression
- reduces psychosomatic illnesses
- alleviates PTSD
- lessens insomnia
- increased self-control & will power
- increased engagement with music
- helps weight loss
- aids smoking cessation
- reduces binge eating
- improves mood

**STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE**
- strong
- promising
- inconclusive
- slight/weak
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- lowers blood pressure
- reduces ageing
- reduces inflammation
- better body temperature regulation
- boosts the immune system
- improves cardiovascular health
- improves motor skills

EMOTIONAL

- increased self-control & will power
- greater empathy & compassion
- more open political views
- improved mood
- increased engagement with music

SOCIAL

- better concentration
- increased political views
- better body temperature regulation
- greater empathy & compassion
- more open political views

STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE

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SOURCES