How to Meditate for the Beginner

Choose a time
Morning is often best because the mind is calmer than it is later in the day. However, the best time is the time that you can commit to on a regular basis. If one longer sit isn’t possible, try two shorter ones.

Choose a space
There is no perfect place. Choose a relatively quiet space where you won’t be disturbed. If you choose to listen to music, choose low tempo, instrumental selections.

Choose a duration
As a general guide, sit as long as is comfortable, plus 5 minutes. Even fifteen or twenty minutes will seem an eternity in the beginning; that impression will change with time and you will be able to increase your sitting time.

Every time you sit: Set your intention: Remember what your purpose is.

Set your posture
Alertness is one of the two essential ingredients in every meditation. Sit on a chair, cushion, or kneeling bench as straight and tall as possible. In the beginning, sitting against a wall can help you learn what a straight back feels like. Around this straight-back position, let the rest of your skeleton and muscles hang freely. Let the hands rest comfortably on your knees or lap. Let the eyes close, bringing the attention inward.

Relax deeply
Openness is the second essential ingredient in every meditation. Once you feel your spine is erect, let everything else relax, hang loose, and soften. Breathing through the nose, loosen the face, neck, hands, and stomach area. You may want to begin at the scalp and move your attention slowly downward, methodically relaxing and softening each part of the body. Consciously releasing body tension will help open yourself to your meditation practice.

Choose an object of meditation
Once you’ve established this alert and open posture, you are ready to decide where you’ll place your attention. Useful objects for beginners are:

• The breath as it enters and leaves the nostrils.
• The rise and fall of the chest.
• The stomach

Whatever object you select, stay with it for at least ten breaths. Even with this effort, your mind will insist on going to its usual places. Make note of this when it happens, and gently lead your attention back to the chosen object of meditation. Your intention and persistence are the key ingredients for cultivating awareness, not the number of times your mind wanders. As often as you need to, check yourself—“Alert and erect? Relaxed and open?” – and begin again.

**Common issues for meditators**

Monkey mind
At first, you may be surprised at how active and uncontrolled your mind is. Don’t worry – you are discovering the truth about your current state of mind. Accept and “sit with” whatever comes up. Don’t try to change it by force, use patience. Sit up, relax, and gently bring your attention back again and again to the object of your meditation.

It is common to mistake thinking for meditating. Staying focused on the body/breath is a good way to stay grounded in the present.

The hindrances
The classical five hindrances to practice are:

•  Grasping: wanting more (or something different) from what’s present right now.
•  Aversion: fear, anger, any form of pushing away.
•  Restlessness: jumpy energy, agitation.
•  Sloth and torpor: sleepy, sinking states of mind and body.
•  Doubt: a mind-trap that says, “it’s no use, this will never work, maybe there’s an easier way”.

Meditators experience all of these states. During sitting practice, if you notice one of the hindrances arising, it is useful to name it silently to yourself, e.g., “grasping, grasping” or “sleepy, sleepy”. If it is strong, try not to pull away from the difficult energy, but bring all of your attention to it. Let yourself experience it fully through the sensations in your body, neither getting lost in it nor pushing it away. Watch what happens without expectations, and when it dissipates, return to the primary focus of your meditation. As Ven. Henepola Gunaratana encourages in Mindfulness in Plain English: “Examine [the hindrances] to death”. When you clearly see the suffering created by grasping and aversion, you will naturally start to let them go.



Reference:

"New to Meditation." *New York Insight Meditation Center How to Meditate Comments*. Limus Design, 2013. Web. 22 Aug. 2016