

## Instructions

First, choose a place and time to sit that you can access daily. If it is readily available, you will be less likely to think, 'I don't have time to sit today'. Before sitting, set the timer clock for the number of minutes you want to meditate. Most people will sit for 20 – 25 minutes, 35 at the most (for experienced folk only). If you are just beginning, it is better to do 10 minutes for a while, then work your way up to 20. You would not want to try too much, then abandon your practice if it seems too difficult. The important principle is consistent, ongoing practice rather than quantity. We are all too often victims of the notion that more is always better, a prescription for perpetual dissatisfaction. We also don't want to be driven to achieve some outcome or to attain some ideal. Striving to gain things while sitting (such as lower blood pressure, relaxation, or serenity) is not wrong; it's just not meditation. Paradoxically, those benefits will more likely emerge if they are not sought. It's OK if they are the reason you are meditating, but when sitting, just sit.

You may choose to sit in a chair or on the floor (if medically unable, lay on your back). If in a chair, sit up (don't lean back) with your buttocks on the forward third of the chair and place your feet firmly on the floor, legs uncrossed. If on the floor, use a cushion to elevate your buttocks so that your knees rest on a mat. There are several traditional postures that work well on the floor. The 'Burmese' posture is easiest for many people, with one ankle placed in front of the other. Another posture easily taken by many is the Japanese seiza: kneel, place a cushion behind you between your calves and your buttocks, then sit on it. A special meditation bench may be used instead of a cushion. If these postures are not medically advisable, select any dignified position that is appropriate to hold without strain for the length of the sitting period. Don't force a rigid erectness, as this depletes your muscles and generates strain. Sway a bit in each direction until your spine feels centered by gravity, then let your body 'hang' from it. Mindfully scan your body to locate areas that are tense. Inhabit them, then release the tension, letting the muscles relax. In any sitting posture, rest your hands on your thighs. Some let the cupped fingers of the left hand rest upon those of the right, touching the thumbs lightly together, as if holding a fragile egg. Others rest each hand on its own leg, palms up, as if catching raindrops.

Your posture facilitates a calm, but alert mind. Meditation is not an attempt to escape the world into an other-worldly bliss. Rather, it is openly aware of present reality, just as it is. Keep your eyes open, gazing down toward a place a few feet before you, not focused on anything in particular. Become aware of the breath, the sound and feel of it as it moves into and out of your body. Don't try to alter it, just follow it as it naturally comes and goes. This is not about trying to change reality. When sitting, we experience reality directly, as it is, without judging it as good or bad, without trying to push it away when it doesn't suit our automatic preference. If we feel an itch, for example, we experience it. To scratch it is to indulge our tendency to try forcing our will on this moment, missing the richness of actually living it and introducing the potential for frustration and disappointment. An itch goes away after awhile, as do all phenomena. Every sensation is temporary. If a breeze touches the face, it is useless to try preserving it, and such an effort only gets in the way of fully experiencing it while it is present. So it is with all phenomena that arise as we sit. The sound of a car passing by is just that sound—not something to wish did not exist, not something to think about, classify, or explain. Like the breath, it comes and goes. We become aware of thoughts arising from time to time, noticing them as we notice the song of a bird or a pain in the leg. We don't try to rid ourselves of thoughts and we don't pursue thoughts; we notice them as the temporary phenomena they are. When the timer bell rings, we get off our cushions.

Further reading: *Meditation Now or Never* by Steve Hagen

Meditation cushions: <http://www.zabuzabu.net/>