



MEDITATION ESSENTIALS

Learning to be still

We all know how to meditate. We just need to be reminded of the details.

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I. Introduction: What is Meditation?

"Meditation is a skillful letting go: gently but with resolution."

Ajahn Sumedho

Article: What is meditation and mindfulness?

<https://yogainternational.com/article/view/what-is-mindfulness>

Imagine you are a bird. Perched in a tree, peering through your bird-eyes at the world. You have no cultural identification, no thought of your past nor inclination to plan your future. The vast landscape requires no labels. Tall branches provide comfort and shelter. Nature provides nourishment. There is no good or bad, only sensations. Sunlight, wind, rain, snow—terrestrial elements unfolding naturally without judgment. Your bird-self maintains no sense of possession over the little bitty birds that have long since fled the nest, or ownership of the tree in which you're perched. Upon hearing a melodic trail of twittering from the neighbouring branch, a fluttering joy rises from the base of your being bubbling up inside you. Unable to contain yourself for even a moment longer, your wings expand. Feeling the soft breeze moving against them, slowly you lean in, diving into the warm current.

Have you ever touched the moment—deliberately opening the mind's eye to fully penetrate your experience of the present? Have you? Would you like to try?

Close your eyes. Take three deep breaths. Upon opening your eyes, slowly scan the room, taking in as many details as you can. Notice colours, textures, shapes and sounds. No need to label them. Simply notice. Now, when you are done, look at your hand; extend your index finger and touch the tip of your nose.



...Five, six, seven minutes later...

Good.

This is mindfulness.

Mindfulness is the process by which momentary engagement is developed. It's not a technique to bestow rapture or bliss, but rather a method of discovering peace. Our six sense doors (sight, smell, sound, taste, touch, and thought) are the means by which we experience the world. The first five senses are merely the methods by which the brain receives data. It is the mind, however, that evaluates and tosses the tinted lenses over the experience, labelling it.

Mindfulness is the constant focusing and refocusing—moment to moment to moment—on the object of our awareness. If listening, we focus on listening; if putting on shoes, we focus on putting on our shoes. This means directing full awareness upon the object of attention: the feeling of the sock on the foot, the sound made sliding the foot into the shoe, the pliancy of the fabric, the sensation of the toe slipping along the bottom.

Momentary engagement is not a misnomer. Science has taught us that all objects in the universe are bundles of energy vibrating at varying frequencies. Nothing is static. From moment to moment to moment, everything in our world is changing. Mindfulness swings open the gate of focused awareness, supporting our engagement. It helps us to be more detailed employees, better friends, and more attentive parents. Developing this skill weaves a translucent thread of lucidity throughout the fabric of our existence. But most importantly, it allows the fullest expression of ourselves and authentic aspects of our being that we haven't connected with in a very long time.

The steps for developing mindfulness are deceptively simple. Execution, however, does not come without its complications. The challenge lies within the realm of our thoughts, the single biggest distraction from our absorption in the present moment. We are instead pulled into reflections of the past, dreams of the future, and what this means to our present moment experience.

The process can be misleading, as it is not the silencing of our thoughts that opens the door to engagement. It is momentary engagement that is the key to silencing our thoughts. By focusing intently upon the task at hand, discursive thinking cannot populate the quiet space of our mind. Judgment ceases. And then, for the moment, we can just be.

Mindfulness is not a permanent state of awareness. It is an ongoing process that deepens the richness of our experience without the obscuring thoughts of good, bad, right, and wrong to cloud our clarity. It is a skill that can be practiced every second of every day—and just like meditation, cannot be developed simply by reading about it.

Touching the moment, even if only briefly, is an experience worth savouring. Perhaps at first it is only for fractions of a second. But with practice, this grows into minutes, eventually enriching every aspect of our life experience.

...Upon hearing a melodic trail of twittering, a bubbling up arises inside you. Unable to contain yourself for even a moment longer, your wings expand. Feeling the soft breeze upon them, you slowly lean in, diving into the warm current.

About Christine Fowle

Principal writer for Searching for OM and founder of Udumbara Yoga, Christine Fowle has studied yoga in the U.S., India, Nepal, Indonesia, and Germany. Endeavouring to discover the keys to greater fulfillment, it was Buddhism and yogic philosophy, mindfulness and meditation that gradually pointed her toward the (yoga) mat. After a decade of practice and three years of intensive study in India and Nepal, Christine has recently returned to her hometown in Upstate New York to focus on guiding others through their spiritual development.

Article: Western medicine finally recognises meditation as treatment for mental illness

After thousands of years Western medicine is finally recognising the benefits of meditation to treat diseases including mental illness. Under the disguise of MBCT, Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy, meditation is being accepted as a way to treat various conditions in the field of mental illnesses.

Meditation has long been used in Eastern philosophy and those who practice it report feeling calmer and happier. Now modern scanning technology has started to reveal why. Meditation helps to reduce activity in the amygdala region of the brain which is responsible for governing feelings of stress. It is also involved in the insula, the part of the brain allows us to feel deep emotions, which is why those who meditate are more likely to be less aggressive. This part of the brain also regulates how we view arguments with loved ones and gives us our sense of regret when we emotionally harm someone, triggering an emotional need to put things right.

In mental illnesses which involve high levels of anxiety, this mechanism becomes overactive and gives feelings that feel out of control. Meditation calms these areas and reduces the links between the emotional and analytical parts of our brain. The MBCT can help people suffering emotional stress or depression either on its own or with the help of drugs.

There have been various types of conditions treated with meditation, such as depression, anxiety, forms of schizophrenia, addictions, bipolar disorder, aggressive behaviour, and of course stress. There are also studies that are currently researching into the physical healing properties of meditation.

Meditation versus Medication

Over the last 200 years, Western medical therapies for depression and mental illness have included leeches, bleeding, drilling holes in the head to let out 'demons', imprisonment, ECT (Electro-Convulsive Therapy) and dangerous psychotropic drugs. On the other hand, some Eastern cultures have simply used herbal remedies and meditation for hundreds of years.



Meditation therapies are a safe, drug free way to resolve issues by returning control to the patient when they feel that they can't control thoughts or emotions. Unlike drugs, it is not a fast-acting therapy, but it

does provide long-term relief without side effects. The side effects of some psychotropic drugs include the very symptoms they claim to treat, such as suicidal feelings, depression, sexual health problems, constipation, rapid heartbeat, menstrual problems, restlessness, drowsiness, blurred vision, hallucination, tremors and tardive dyskinesia (muscle movements that the patient can't control). These side effects are enough to make most people feel worse than their original condition made them feel. These symptoms also get worse when the drug is taken for extended periods of time, whereas meditation will provide greater help the longer the practice is carried out.

In a world where people seem to want instant cures as fast as they can get an instant coffee, meditation may not seem to be the kind of answer that would be popular, as it takes time and effort to work. However now that Western science is finally catching up, we may finally see progress in the field of mental health, a field that has seen little real progress in the last 200 years.

Sources for this article include:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk>

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

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<http://www.makingthemodernworld.org.uk>

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About the author:

D Holt has written over 200 articles in the field of alternative health and is currently involved in research in the UK into the mechanisms involved in healing due to meditation, hypnosis and spiritual healers and techniques. Previous work has included investigations into effects of meditation on addiction, the effects of sulphites on the digestive system and the use of tartrazine and other additives in the restaurant industry. New blog is now available at <http://tinyurl.com/sacredmeditation> or follow on twitter @sacredmeditate.

Tips That May Assist in Your Personal Meditation Practice



From my own personal experience, I know and understand the difficulties associated with meditation. For me, it was a “do or die” scenario because I knew my then-current state of mind needed to be examined, explored, and realigned. My temper was often off the charts, and depression was also not making my life any more fun!

Here are a few ideas which you can play around with in your own practice, that has helped me. I put these as statements of truth but know that they are my truths. You may want to explore them, but only adopt them as your own truth once you are satisfied that it holds value for you.

✧ **Meditation is not always comfortable, but it is always necessary!**

The effects of continued meditation are cumulative, and growth is proposed to be exponential.

✧ **Rather than trying to achieve a quiet mind or control over your thoughts, rather aim for non-attachment.**

Allow thoughts to come and go as they please. When you notice that you have attached yourself to a particular thought and are fantasizing about its outcomes (i.e. an earlier conversation with your Mother which you are now mentally elaborating on) simply detach from the thought, and bring your attention back to your breath.

✧ **Breathing is most important.**

Maybe that is why it is used to bring you into the present moment?

✧ **Guided meditation works but is least likely to teach you how to meditate by yourself.**

Work with guided meditations only when you have something specific you would like to address. Do not get attached to another person’s voice to guide you through your meditation. One day you might get stranded on a bus, an island or another planet and your favourite Louise L. Hay MP3 is stuck on your computer... at home! Also, is it not the person presenting the meditation that does most of the work, while you lie back and pretend to listen to the words?

✧ **Early morning is usually a better time to meditate.**

Get your meditation over and done with before you get going with the rest of the day. Unless you actually like the challenge of “Oh, I’ll just do it at lunch... Nope, lunch is over so let me do it before I leave to pick up the kids.... Nope, not going to make it... Maybe after supper.... No... oh, hell let’s try again tomorrow!”

✧ **About finding that special, perfect gap in your time:**

- Instead of “I have to ...” maybe you could try saying “I get to...”.
- ALLOW yourself, do not force yourself.
- Your meditation practice need not be an hour-long ritual. Simple and short will also do the trick.

A Space and Place for Meditation

Creating a designated space for your meditation can be extremely exciting. However, people tend to forget that it is about the meditation and not the props. These could in fact cause distractions and end up being more of a frustration thus resulting in giving up on regular meditation.

With that said, there are a few things you may want to experiment with. Here are my suggestions.

Why do I need to devote a space for my Meditation?

When you use the same spot for meditation, it becomes familiar. You get comfortable with your surroundings. Each time you enter that space you already start getting into the desired frame of mind.

Once a spot has been set up for meditation, there is no need to run around before each session to try and set it up again. This eliminates the possibility of distractions and disappointments when, for example, your favourite pillow is not in the right spot. Everything will be in place and you will be ready to sit down and just meditate.

Where would be the best spot for my Meditations?

Finding a spot that is exactly right is often considered to be vital for our practice. But we do need to remember that it is about the ability to meditate anywhere, at any time.

With that said, here are a few things you might want to take into consideration:

- ✧ Facing east is usually a good idea, especially when choosing to meditate in the morning. This also connects you to the oncoming day as this is the direction from which the sun rises, casting a growing and intensifying light as it ascends.
- ✧ Facing west might be more appropriate for evening or night-time meditation. This will allow you to 'release' the day and let go of built up tensions.
- ✧ Should you decide to meditate outside (whether out in nature or just out in your garden), remember to take Mother Nature into consideration. Although meditation can only do good to the environment, the weather, neighbourhood, and familiarity to your surroundings might have an impact on your daily meditation practice.

What do I need for my Meditation?

Meditation can be done anywhere – even a few minutes in the bathroom attending to nature's call can be used for a quick breather, focussing your attention, and calming the nerves. Should your meditation become more of a daily ritual (as it should), the following items could become invaluable:

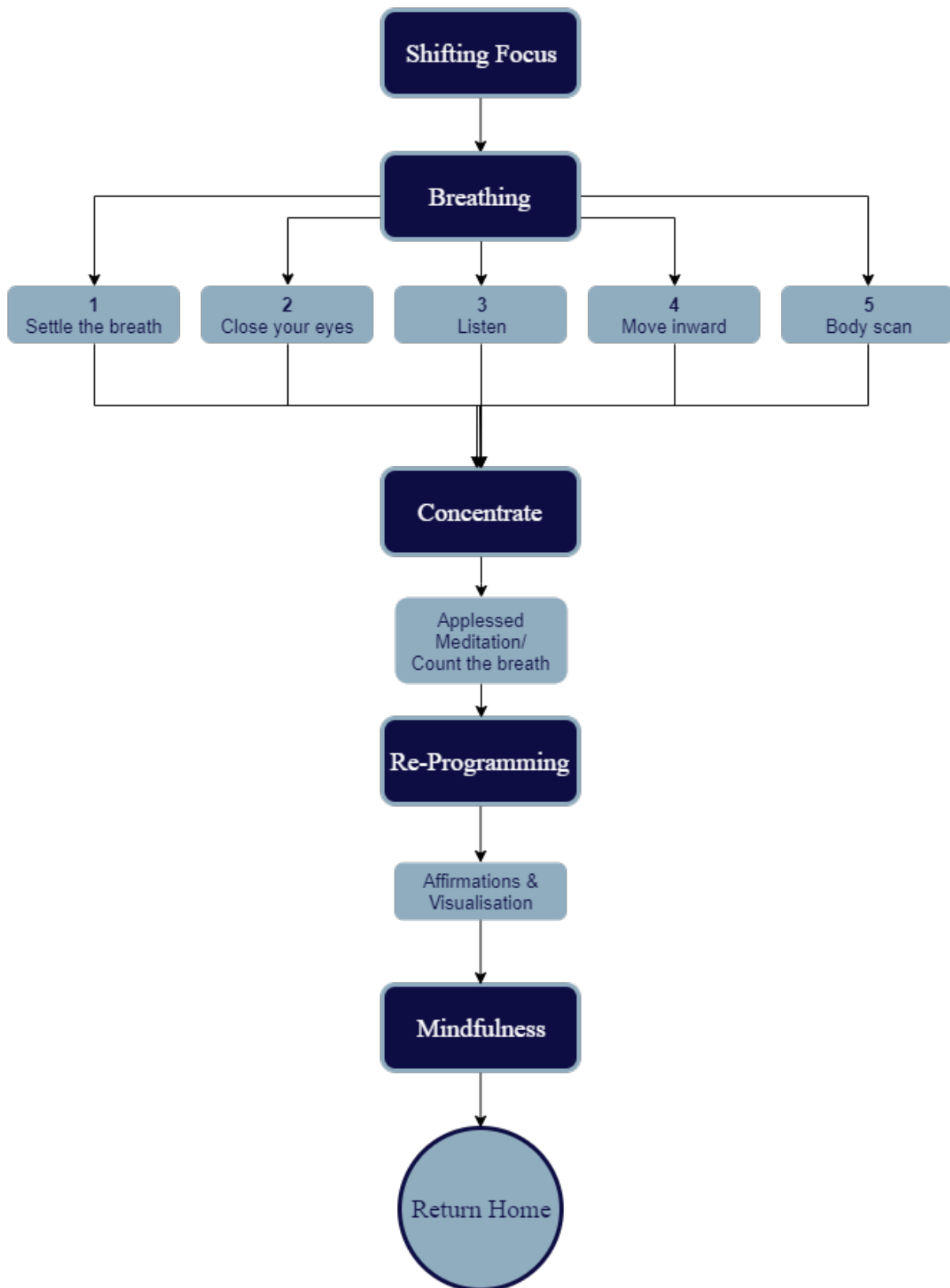
- ✧ A chair, couch, recliner, or pillow are all perfect for meditation. Sitting upright is preferable as this might help you from falling asleep during your meditation. This is not to say you should not ever fall asleep and neither does this mean you have to be completely uncomfortable whilst meditating. If meditation is done as a way of getting more sleep, then lying down might not be a bad idea. But if you would rather just calm down before a hectic day begins, sleeping would defy the purpose.
- ✧ Using incense or aromatherapy oil is a wonderful way of creating a mood. However, make sure that it does not distract you from your purpose which is to relax and focus.
- ✧ Personally, and for the most part, I do not meditate to any music. If *you* decide to listen to any kind of music, my suggestion would be that it should be very carefully selected. Music could play around with the rhythm(s) of your own brainwaves. We have all been made aware that various states of consciousness cause different wavelength patterns in the brain. Many guided meditation recordings use these rhythms to induce the desired state for meditation – some more successfully than others. A person can fully experience the intended state of calm and openness when tuned in to these meditations.

A point to note: listening to classical music, and in particular Baroque music, could greatly enhance your ability to focus. Composers such as Mozart, Vivaldi and Händel are reputed to be the best when used for studying and I have found that it also works well for meditation. Playing it softly as background music could also drown out any potential noises from elsewhere.

- ✧ Soft light (e.g. Candles, dimmed lights) may induce a calm and more romantic experience. However, sunlight is equally great and healthy, too. Just remember to put on sunblock as the mental state during meditation could cause the body's resistance to drop and you might end up with sunburn.



Meditation Structure

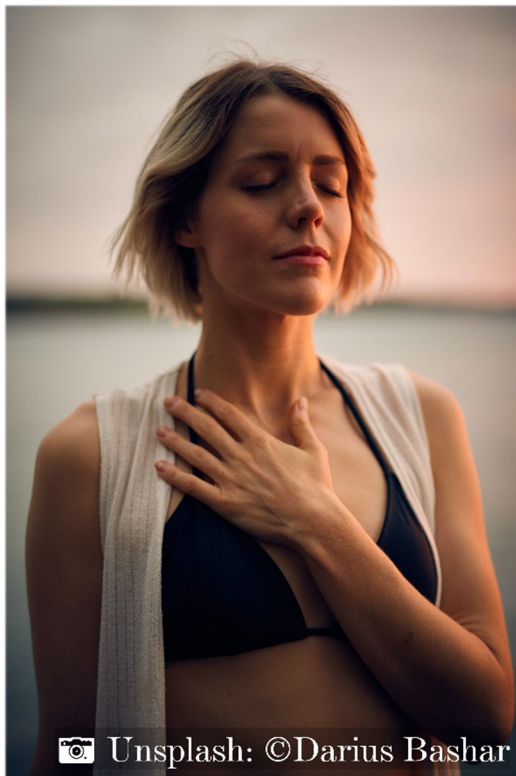


2. Breathing

The Importance of Breathing

Breathing is a vital part of our lives. We need oxygen to survive. It is a simple know fact that we can survive for a few days without food, less without water and only seconds without air.

It is no surprise, then that we cannot meditate successfully without sufficient oxygen in our body.



Unsplash: ©Darius Bashar

Through quite simple yet effective breathing techniques, we are able to not only manipulate our pulse and heart rate, but also our emotional state of being. There are many creatures on the planet who use breathing to calm themselves down, hype themselves up for the hunt or even survive effectively in certain conditions.

Whales and dolphins are particularly good examples, as they can dive to great depths with only a single breath of air in their lungs. These are mammals and they do not filter oxygen from the water like their fellow aquatic inhabitants. Their lungs have been designed to breath pure air only.

The following exercise is designed to help slow down your breathing, and thus also slow down the heart rate without robbing the body of necessary oxygen.

The 6 4 6 8 Breathing Technique

Sit, lie, or stand comfortably with your back straight – do not slouch!

- Once you are comfortable enough, **breathe in** deeply through your nose, for **4** equal counts.
- **Hold** the breath for **6** equal counts.
- **Exhale** through slightly parted lips for **8** equal counts.
- **Hold** for **6** equal counts.

Repeat 4 times, or until you are breathing comfortable and can feel that your heart rate has calmed down.

3. Concentrate

It is easier to move into a mindfulness state by first employing a concentrative form of meditation. Any concentrative exercise will work and for this course I have included to variants.

When the brain is occupied for any length of time with a strenuous focus on a particular activity or action, it is sometimes too confused at the end of the exercise that it stops thinking for a short amount of time. With practice, this *stillness* can be expanded upon. And with even further practice we can eventually invoke this stillness whenever, wherever.

Exercise #1: The Appleseed Meditation



Awareness of the Seed

Take an apple seed and scan thoroughly. Feel it, see it, and make sure you have observed as much of its detail as you possibly can.

Focus on the Seed

Close your eyes and see the seed hovering in front of you. Hold it still and just focus on the seed as a flat[tened] object, i.e. a 2D picture of the seed.

Hold that picture for a few minutes.

Animate the Seed

See the seed again, floating in the same spot again but this time use your mind to make it turn around slowly. Use your mind to turn it first to the left. Now change direction. Give it three to five slow turns to each side, before you let it change direction again.

Do this for another few minutes.

Deconstruct the Seed

Hold the seed in one place again. Imagine an invisible eraser slowly wiping the seed out of your mind, starting at the top and working downwards until it is completely blank in front of you. Try to maintain control over the eraser by 'deleting' the seed as slowly as you can. Focus now on the blank space where the seed was.

Keep the focus for as long as possible, until your thoughts start to distract you again.

Exercise #2: Count Your Breaths

Make sure you are going to be comfortable for the next couple of minutes. However, be sure that you are positioned in such a way so as not to fall asleep.

- Close your eyes and pretend that you are focussing them on the back of your eyelids.
- See the number “100” floating right in front of you.
- Take a calm and relaxed breath.
- As you exhale, see the number change to “99”.
- Breath in.
- With each exhalation, count down another number.
- You may stop at “0” or “1” – whichever feels right to you.



 Photo by Motoki Tonn on Unsplash

Variation:

You can also do this exercise by counting with the breath from one to ten, and then back again. Another variation is to recite the alphabet front to back, and back to front again. This provides quite a challenge for the mind and you must really concentrate to get the sequence right when saying it backward.

Tip:

As you breath in the first time, smile and try to keep the smile. The body releases serotonin as an automatic reaction to a smile, no matter whether it is real or fake.

4. Re-Programming

Affirmations

What is an affirmation?

Our mind is filled with thoughts, most of which are (sadly) negative! Have you ever heard of the term "negative self-talk"? Having imaginary conversations with either ourselves, or another person is usually wracked with negative slurs and commentary. We engage in imaginary battles with an adversary and little do we realise that this is doing damage to our own self-image: the brain is unable to distinguish between inner fantasies and outer reality!

How do we change that?

With affirmations!

An affirmation is a statement that we repeat to ourselves either inwardly or out loud. It is always, always in the present tense and stated in the positive. Here is why: the mind does not fathom the word "not" and so whenever we make a negative statement (what we do NOT want) the brain only registers the subject, not the intent.

Example: I would like stop acting out whenever I get angry. Naturally, we would all like to say, "I will not get angry" but the brain only hears "I get angry"! Can you see where this is going to end up?

What could I rather say?

First of all, I would need to feel what would be a step up from anger – how would I rather be feeling or acting? Maybe I would like to feel more in control? Knowing that I can not control other people or how they respond, I will have to look at how I respond.

How to create an affirmation

Choosing an affirmation that sits well and at the same time feels real is especially important: if I do not believe in the affirmation it will have little effect. For this reason, I have come up with the following affirmation to help me with the anger I feel when someone confronts me:

"I am cool, calm and collected."

The affirmation feels nice and I can relate to it, so I write it down on a piece of paper ten times in succession. I may keep it with me, and I need to repeat it 10 times either out loud (maybe in front of the mirror), or I may repeat it silently to myself.

And that is it!



5. Mindfulness Practice

Watch Your Breath

- Sit comfortably and upright.
- Slow down your breathing to a deep and comforting rhythm.
- Start paying attention to your breath as it enters your body. Follow it all the way down into your lungs.
- When you start exhaling, feel it leaving your body from the bottom of your lungs all the way up through your nose and out your nostrils.
- Carry on paying attention to your breath for as long as you can.

Important notes

As you breath, be sure to be "In the NOW". Feel and experience each action of the breathing process.

Do not judge any thoughts that come into your mind. Rather, acknowledge each though, label it and move it to the back of your mind. Much like wrapping a parcel, putting a label on it, and throwing it on a pile in a back room.



6. Simple Mindfulness Routine

A Simple Mindfulness Routine

Shifting Focus

- ♥ **Get comfortable.**
 - Refer to the video lecture "Meditation Tips" for more details.

Breathing

- ♥ Settle the breath.
Run the **6 4 6 8** routine at least three to five times to get the heart rate to slow down.
- ♥ **Now close your eyes.**
Meditation may be done with the eyes open or closed. There is no right or wrong, but if you find that you get easily distracted with the eyes open, you may close them. Also be aware that when your eyes are closed, all other senses are heightened, making it an even greater challenge not to get fixated on any other sensations or sensory input.
 - Should you decide to keep your eyes open, a soft focus is advised. In other words: do not look at an object, but rather allow your eyes to un-focus, much like when you daydream.
 - Should you decide to close your eyes, do not pinch the eyelids closed. Look at the back of your eyelids and do not roll the eyes up or down.
- ♥ **Listen.**
Next, take some time to notice the sounds around you. Do not fixate yourself on any one sound, but merely be aware of them. Let them drift through your consciousness.
- ♥ **Move inward and scan your body.**
Bring your awareness inside the body. Starting from the top of your head, do a mental scan all the way down to your toes. Notice, but do not attach to any sensations in the body. Merely be aware of the sensation and move on.
- ♥ How do you feel?
Take a moment to establish your mood. Are you happy, elated, aggravated or sad, perhaps? Do NOT analyse this at all, but once again just notice it.

Concentrate

- ♥ Start counting.
As you breathe in, count "one". As you exhale, count "two". Carry on doing this. You may count to number ten and start over, or you may wish to count to a hundred, two hundred. It does not matter, as long as you spend at least five minutes counting your breath.
- ♥ After a few minutes of concentrative meditation, stop!

The mind may be inactive for a very short while. Once the thoughts start coming back, move on to the next section.

Re-Programming

- ♥ Begin repeating your *affirmations* and/or *visualisations*.

Repeat a personal affirmation and if you are able to, visualise yourself living that affirmation.

Mindfulness

- ♥ Now LET GO!

When you have repeated your affirmation or visualisation, disconnect and simply observe the breath. Be with the breath, and allow whatever thoughts arise up, to move *through* the consciousness. If you find yourself engaging in internal conversations or attaching to certain thoughts, just gently detach and bring the attention back to the breath.

- ♥ *Return home.*

After about five to ten minutes of floating on your breath, allow yourself to come back to the chair you are sitting in. Notice the sensation of your feet on the floor and your body on the chair.

Decide to open your eyes... and when YOU are ready, open them!

Take a sip of water. Decide to focus yourself, get up and have a great day.

7. Conclusion: Mindfulness Every Day

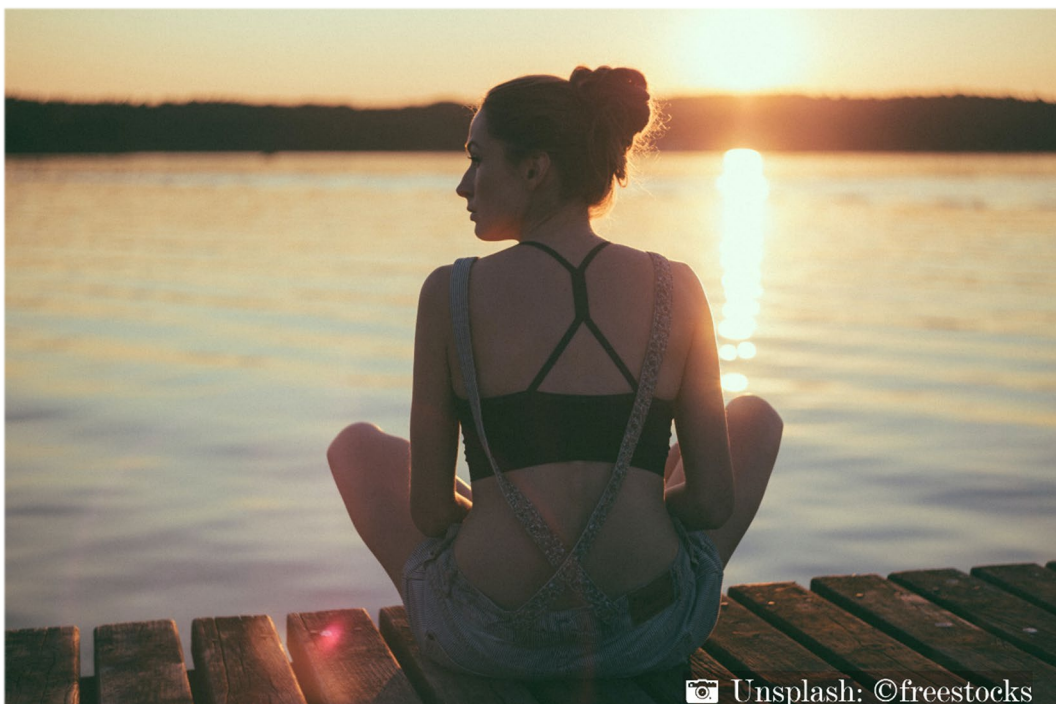
Once you "get" it, Mindfulness is something so simple that you can use it anywhere. Whenever you feel stressed during the day, you can simply apply the Breath Watch for a few moments.

Are you a sporty person? Or perhaps you do yoga? Then you are most likely already practicing mindfulness or have at least access to opportunities to practice. I used to often do it while I was still doing IT support and felt the stresses of user support becoming a bit too much. Right there, in front of my desk with my eyes wide open I would pay attention to something like my breath or my fingers playing across my keyboard while typing a reply to an email.

Mindful eating is another way you can help yourself lose weight. Pay attention to each bite of food instead of flipping through your phone or watching television. Chew with intention and become aware of the taste of the food you are eating – you would be surprised at the hidden flavours you might find!

Meditation is also a great way to combat mild insomnia! By using a concentrative exercise, you can bore the brain to sleep, or applying the "Breath Watch" method you can calm down the body and heart rate.

Try it for 21 days! Form a habit and with consistent, persistent effort you will see results!



About Nico Redelinghuys

Reiki Master, Meditation Coach and Hypnotherapist

Nico is a Reiki Master, trained in the Usui method of natural healing. His interest in the Chakras, both the traditional as well as the Ascension Chakras, has made him a specialist, helping you align and balance your own system.

He has been presenting meditation workshops since 2009, and you can learn more about his journey on this [LINK](#).

He is also a trained hypnotherapist and combines his hypnotherapy sessions with counselling as well as reiki.

With a keen interest in Colour Therapy and Colour Psychology, Nico applies the methods of energy healing and colour to your system. His passion for teaching has encouraged him to develop various workshops on subjects ranging from Mindfulness Meditation to Faeries and Elemental Beings and he is very knowledgeable.

Nico also hosts and co-ordinates the Heart Connect Meditation Group that runs once a month in the Helderberg area. His guided meditations focus on bringing in Higher Divine Light to assist in Humanity's Ascension process.