

# 5 TIPS TO GET THE MOST OF THE MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

**Whether you're starting with meditation and mindfulness or you're looking to deepen your connection, following are my top tips to get the most out of your practice.**

## **1 Find the best time to practice**

Engaging in a mindfulness practice requires you to focus so you can observe everything that is happening, without reacting or simply zoning out. If you set aside time in the morning to meditate because it's convenient but you are not really a morning person, it will be much harder to drop into a focused state of mind. Initially it was only after the physical exhaustion of a sweaty yoga class that I could meditate and "simply be" with all that was going on in my head.

Experiment with your meditations at different times of the day and find what works best. The most important thing is keeping a consistent rhythm, so that means it's better to practice 10 to 15 minutes, two to 3 times a week, than for a half-hour practice once a month.

## **2 Setting up your space + preparing for practice**

If you start your mindfulness practice and then you hear a "ding" every time you get an email, or you're constantly interrupted (by a dog / cat / family member), then it will be very difficult to drop into a place of observation and non-reaction.

- Whatever device you're using to follow the meditation, make sure you disabled all notifications during your practice, often there's a "Zen mode" or a "Do Not Disturb" setting that you can use on your device.
- Make sure you set boundaries so you can be uninterrupted for the 15 to 20 minutes of the practice. Obviously life happens and you can't control everything but choosing a time when you're less likely to be disturbed or notifying family members that you'll be unavailable can go a long way.
- Clean and organize your space; the space around you reflects the space inside your mind. If you want to "declutter" your mind and increase focus, start by clearing off your desk or tidying up the room. I used to have a dedicated corner of my house where I set up an altar with my sacred objects, candles, books, etc. so just being in that space was calming. Also seeing that corner of the room, if I hadn't meditated in some time, reminded me to practice.
- Have a full glass of water before practice. Most of us can benefit from hydrating more ;-)

## 5 TIPS TO GET THE MOST OF THE MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

### 3 Finding a “comfortable seat”

I spent 10 days at a silent meditation course where we meditated 10+ hours a day and I spent many of those hours ruminating on why we hadn't been given some instruction on how to sit comfortably as my legs and joints throbbed in pain.

During meditation and awareness practices we need to be in a position of alertness (so as not to doze off or zone out), but also comfortable enough where we can observe things such as physical sensations without obsessing over them or fidgeting constantly.

Below are three ways I recommend sitting for meditation. Lying down is also an option but be mindful you don't fall asleep, unless you're looking to do just that;-)

Cross-legged, lifted hips, elevating your hips decreases the flexion in the joints and enables some to more easily lengthen the spine. A pillow or folded blanket can serve to lift the bum off the ground. Notice if you like the support under your entire bum or if it's better to JUST lift the sit bones off the ground to feel a tilting forward of the pelvis bowl. Some find that helpful to lengthen the spine.

Sitting back on your heels -- with or without support under the bum -- is a great one if sitting cross-legged is just too much on the hips or doesn't allow length in the

spine. You can also consider putting a blanket under the tops of your feet or ankles.

Sitting in a chair -- feet flat on the ground, sitting closer to the front edge; this position is great if you want to practice right at your desk or in your office. Sitting a bit away from the back of the chair enables you to keep the spine long without leaning back (and possibly drifting off). Feet flat on the ground allows you to “ground” down through your legs to feel stable and secure while lengthening the spine effortlessly with breath.

### 4 Don't worry about “emptying your mind”

Many people say that they're not “good at meditation” because they're not able to empty their mind. There's no such thing as being good at meditation, as this is a practice of connecting with yourself, and really a personal and lifelong journey. There will always be “stuff” in the mind; maybe it's an awareness of sound or smell, or hearing your own voice(es) in your head with their commentary. Maybe it's a realization that you still have to do “XYZ” or you start crafting that important email in your head that you plan to write later.

While meditating, all of these things may and likely will still happen. The difference is your awareness of what is happening.

## 5 TIPS TO GET THE MOST OF THE MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

You can let all the “noise” sit in the background of your mind while bringing your awareness, or your consciousness to the foreground. This means that by simply noticing a thought you’re able to let it go and come back to your awareness of breath, or scanning your body.

There is no such thing as an empty mind, but there is a much increased ability to focus and differentiate in a meditator’s mind.

### **5** Avoid the “Sunk Cost” trap

The Sunk Cost Bias is an economic behavior of committing to something even though you know it will fail, simply because you’ve already invested (time or money) in it. With meditation, sometimes you’re just not feeling it. Maybe you didn’t sleep well, maybe you had an intense day and sitting still and focusing isn’t happening.

Shift. Use the time in another way that fosters a connection with yourself. Consider journaling, or get up and shake it out or dance. Meet yourself where you are. And come back when you’re ready.