

Establishing an Effortless Meditation Routine

Fine, you want to meditate. You know it will be good for you. But you have a tough time doing it on any regular basis. That's not an uncommon predicament. Many people have gone through that stage and eventually found a way to establish an easy, regular practice for themselves. How did they do it? They used strategies like those below. Experiment, aiming to get some of those strategies to work for you. You will, then, in fact find yourself enjoying the many benefits of meditation.

Make free space in your life. Feel there's not enough time to meditate? The best remedy is to subtract some of your current routines that are non-vital perhaps TV watching, recreational reading, computer surfing, phone calling, even extra sleep time. It's far better to choose to subtract forty-five minutes of non-vital activity from your days than to try to squeeze meditation into what feels like an already full-up day.

Keep your goal in mind. Your goal is to develop an effortless meditation routine. You want to make meditation as automatic and regular as teeth brushing. What you don't want are daily decisions about whether or not to meditate; that will only sap your energy and be discouraging. You want to have set times to meditate each day and then, when those times come, you want to find yourself just doing it, no fuss or bother. Make that your goal and keep adjusting your approach until you notice you are meditating as automatically as that.

Make a specific plan. After experimenting a bit, decide when are the best times for you to meditate, such as immediately after washing in the morning and before preparing dinner in the evening. Perhaps even decide where you will sit, and what you will do about ringing phones. A general meditation plan will not serve you well. A specific and precise plan will makes progress smooth and easy. (Note: The four items immediately below are often useful to include in your plan.)

Plan to wait out impulses to delay. “I need a snack first.” “I'll meditate after I check my email.” If you give in to such delaying thoughts, you risk seriously weakening your resolve. When you are ready to meditate, such thoughts will inevitably come to mind. But no thought lasts forever. Thoughts come, but they also go. So wait out unhealthy thoughts. While waiting, perhaps focus on your breathing. In that way, you will be gaining valuable practice in not automatically reacting to whatever comes to mind.

Plan to use a timer. When meditating, don't rely on estimating the time or looking at a clock. That complicates the task. Practice sticking to it until the timer signals it's time to stop.

Plan to neutralize urges to end early. Plan to let go of any impulses to end a meditation early, or to skip it altogether. How to let go of such impulses? (a) Simply notice when such a thought comes to mind. Perhaps even notice where it shows up in your body. (b) Then turn your attention from that thought and place it onto your breathing. Enjoy a few breaths. (3) And then continue to meditate. Until the timer signals it's time to stop.

Plan to use a check sheet/card: Perhaps make a grid on a 3X5 card with days of the week and spaces for your first and second meditations. Then insert a smiley face or check mark after each successful practice. Also congratulate yourself aloud. “Good job!” you might exclaim. Or “I did it!” Do not record anything for times you do not meditate. In that way, monitor your progress.

Consider a gradual approach. You might set an easily-manageable target for the immediate future, just to get you going confidently, such as three days with at least one meditation each day. In that way, challenge yourself without overwhelming yourself. And then keep expanding the challenge until you reach your goal of daily, automatic meditation.

Consider a reward. You might, for example, give yourself a special treat for achieving streaks of, say, ten meditations completed. Alternatively, allow yourself to watch TV, read your novel, etc, *only* if you have reached your goal for the day or for the week. Some people like to give themselves points for each small success so each small act adds up to big reward.

Write and share your plan. It will help to write the details of what you plan to do. And to tell someone about your plan and, again, the more detail you share the better. Don't let the plan remain in your head. Writing it and sharing it brings it much closer to reality.

Keep giving yourself a fresh start. If you lapse, don't assume the lapse is forever. Simply begin again. Don't ever define yourself as having failed. Don't give up. Affirm: I can still do it. One step after another gets me up the mountain!

Request a buddy's assistance. Ask a family member or friend to occasionally ask you how you are doing with your plan. Perhaps also suggest how that person should respond to you, such as, "I like that you stuck to it and trusted me to support you." It is much easier to manage life changes when we do not try to go it alone.

Perhaps create a special meditation place. It can be comforting to have a special place to meditate a favorite chair, corner, room. That can draw you into the activity.

Recall a success from your past. Think of a time you succeeded in making a change in your life. And/or practice making an easy change to remind yourself that you can change and that change often feels good. You might, for example, pledge to buy a card to send to a sick child; or to say something nice to someone who might appreciate it; or to insert a three-minute brisk walk into your day; or to make a change to your furniture arrangement; or to change the sequence of some of your day's activities. It's good to know that you can change.

Be prepared to experience obstacles. The grooves in your life now have power over you. They will want you to stay as you were. So be prepared to overcome resistance from inside yourself, including completely forgetting that you made a plan to meditate. Yet know you can succeed. Many people do. Also know that practicing overcoming obstacles is in itself a valuable life practice. Don't allow yourself to give in and give up. Be your strong, persisting self.

Notice counter-productive self-talk. Notice if you say, for example, "I can't do it." "I don't really want to exert effort." "Fankly, I prefer my old familiar old ways." Just notice. Noticing is the first step to being able to let it go of such self-defeating self talk.

Make it a fun challenge. See how creative you can be in finding a way to succeed. Be flexible and adjust your plan until you become a winner.

Visualize yourself as you want to be. Take a moment or two each day to practice visualizing your days as if they were already changed. Once you can see yourself living as you want to live, without the old habit or with the new one, your new life will emerge much more easily.

Finally, be optimistic. Know you can change your life! Perhaps draw something, cut out a picture or write a slogan indicating how you want to be: More free. Or more often your loving, joyous self. Or less stuck in your frustrating past. And post it somewhere so your future is steadily visible.