

Ten tips for setting up a meditation practice:

1. Get some instruction

You can learn the techniques of meditation from books and CDs: there are some good ones around. But it helps a lot to learn from a real person. Take a course – or go to a class where you can ask questions about the issues. In time, it helps to have friends or even teachers who are more experienced meditators than you are.

2. Settle on a practice that suits you

On an MBSR course there are three main practices – the mindfulness of breathing, the body scan and mindful movement, and there are many others out there. It's worth experimenting a bit and then settling on the practice, or combination of practices, that work for you.

3. Find a regular time for practice

You might start off thinking you'll just try fitting meditation into your day somehow or other, but establishing a practice means finding a time that works for you. For many people, first thing in the morning before the day starts up is a good time; others prefer the evening. There are pros and cons with either so you'll need to experiment.

4. Set up a meditation place

You can meditate anywhere, but if you sit down amid clutter it has an effect. So set aside a space that evokes the feeling of meditation. Some flowers, a candle or an image on a table can be enough to encourage the feeling that you're leaving aside the usual preoccupations. It also helps to set aside the cushions or chair that need for meditation, and it's worth thinking about getting some meditation cushions or a stool.

5. Talk to your family or housemates

To avoid people barging in or turning up the music just as you start to get settled, talk to the people you live with and let them know what you are doing. Don't worry if they think you're weird: if they notice you're calmer and happier they'll soon change.

6. Meditate with others

It's hard to keep anything going on your own, at least to start with. We all need encouragement and guidance. Many people find a setting where they can meditate with others: Buddhist centres, sitting groups, follow on courses.

7. Go on retreat

Retreats are a chance to get away from all the things that usually fill up our lives. They vary in length: you can find day retreats or residential retreats for a weekend or longer. Just being quiet and meditating several times a day lets everything settle down so your experience can go deeper. On an intensive retreat you don't do much apart from meditate, but there are less demanding options as well.

8. Take your practice off the cushion

If you think of meditation as something that only happens in the formal practice time, it will be hard to maintain. So look for ways to keep the thread of mindfulness and meditation alive through the day. The Three Minute Breathing Space gives you time to stop and connect with mindfulness, and you can find many more, informal ways to do the same.

9. Reflect on your values

Most of us get enthusiastic, every so often, about a certain kind of exercise or studying a particular subject. But, looking back, we only maintain a few of these. They are the ones that touch on the values at the core of our lives. If you can make the connection between something that is a deep-seated drive like helping others or understanding the truth, or a pressing concern like not getting depressed or being more effective as a parent, then you're much more likely to be able to sustain it.

10. Be patient ... and persistent

Establishing a regular meditation practice is a long-term project. You may miss days, get discouraged or just forget about meditation for a while. The key thing is to keep going. If you force yourself to meditate when you really don't feel like it, you'll probably have a reaction to the whole idea; but if you wait until you do feel like it before you pick your practice up again, it may never happen.