



Meditation: Take Five

by Constance Wilkinson, LMHC

Word's out that meditation is good for you. Good for stress relief, good for pain management, good for mood management, good for creating a bit of distance from one's habitual patterns of thought, good for self-soothing, good for developing compassion for self and others, just pretty darn good.

Recent studies demonstrate the remarkable power of mind over matter, through meditation, producing actual measurable changes in brain structures. How cool is that? I would suggest: very.

Meditation is all-natural. It's organic. It is universally available to all, regardless of socio-economic status, ethnicity, class, religion, culture. It doesn't seem to have a downside. So, really, why aren't you meditating? And what might happen if you did?

What might happen if you started doing just five minutes of meditation a day? Or better yet—what might happen if you started doing five minutes of meditation twice a day, morning and evening? I mean, really, here's this great methodology, now widely available for the first time in history—what's keeping you from taking advantage of it? What's getting in your way?

Arguably the most profound obstacle to doing meditation is getting yourself to do it. That's why the "Take Five" frame works pretty well. Everybody can spare five minutes, can they not? It's easy to talk yourself out of practicing if you need to make special efforts to meditate, going to a center at a specific time and place, fitting it in to your already over-booked schedule.

I'm not suggesting that it's a bad idea to practice meditation in a group. On the contrary, it's a good idea, and it can make things a lot easier. But until the habit of doing meditation grows in you, and while you're dealing with initial obstacles to practice, going out to meditate can become a way to avoid doing any meditation practice at all.

But meditating for five minutes? In your very own home? No big deal, come as you are? Everybody has time for that. Everybody has that opportunity. No one can support the excuse, "I can't."

So if you can't say, "I can't" you can decide that you can.

Next, you need to decide that you will. Meditate, that is.

You set yourself the task of meditating for five minutes. Starting—when? You could do it right now. You could. Or you could make a commitment to start tomorrow morning, just for five minutes, after you've had your morning tea or coffee, washed your face, brushed your teeth, and before you read the paper, listen to the radio, or go online. In that intermediate state. Up, and awake, comfortable, but not yet sucked in to the day.

If you have a timer on your phone to set for five minutes, that's good. A kitchen timer works, too, but it's louder. A clock is okay, just try not to check it every other second. Now here's the hardest part: just as you're sitting down to meditate, before you've even started, you must address a sudden and wholly predictable upsurge of distracting thoughts.

Their content will be: all the many reasons why you shouldn't be meditating right now.

These thoughts will continue throughout your meditation period, by the way, but they begin before you actually sit down. Therefore, it's good to understand that while they are perfectly normal, don't listen to them. Don't obey them.

Their siren song goes:

oh my gosh I forgot I have to call Aunt Charlotte RIGHT NOW she'll be so ticked if I don't – I forgot to call the Vet about the dog's pills I have to write that down RIGHT NOW – I really don't have time for this I can't believe I set myself this stupid task it's not going to make any difference anyway I don't want to do this RIGHT NOW and my hip hurts and I really am feeling a bit depressed I can do this later when I'm feeling perkier there's no point in doing it when I'm not feeling well is there I really don't feel like doing this at all ugh RIGHT NOW.

Ignore all those thoughts.

Sit down.

Meditate.



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Here's a good meditation technique.

Sit on a chair or on a cushion on the floor. Keep your back relaxed and straight, not rigid. Allow your eyes to focus on an object of your choice that you place about six feet away from you, in front. It should be placed so that when you rest your eyes on it, your eyes are looking down, at about a 45 degree angle. Let your hands rest on your knees.

Now, place your mind/attention on the object of focus—a blue flower, let's say. Let your mind rest on the object of focus, and breathe naturally. Don't try to suppress thoughts. Don't try to create a thought-free state. Just rest your awareness on the flower, keeping your eyes on it, and relax.

When you discover that you have lost focus and have drifted off into thoughts, say to yourself, without judgment, "thinking, thinking" and gently pick up your awareness, your attention, and re-place it on the blue flower.

When, later on, you again discover that you have forgotten the object of focus and have drifted away by following after discursive thoughts, say "thinking, thinking" and gently re-place your attention on the blue flower.

Later, rinse, repeat.

If you can follow this simple technique, you will reap many benefits. Really. Seriously. But you must build the willingness to bring yourself to do it. It is not something theoretical that you could understand by reading a book. It is experiential; it is scientific; it is evidence-based.

We spend most of our lives in distraction. This method, followed accurately, will help you to work with mind, and later help you to distinguish between the process of thoughts arising, and the content of thoughts.

Meditation practice offers many benefits. To take advantage of these benefits, you must actually sit down and practice. Anyone can practice meditation for just five minutes. For example, you can, too, can you not?

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