

Meditation for Busy People



My column in The Times Herald Record, in which my editor gives me 375 words to explain what meditation isn't, what it is, how to do it, and the benefits. How'd I do?

Silence. Stillness. Emptiness. These concepts may seem elusive, even frightening, yet they are the supposed goals of meditation, which has so many touted benefits. What are we, in our distracted, wired and multi-tasking culture to do?

Let's clear up some common misunderstandings and make this helpful, healthful practice available to you, *today*.

What You Don't Need:

A mantra, a secret technique from a guru, a special cushion, an altar, any particular religious or spiritual belief or sitting position.

What You Do Need:

- 1. Consistency.** Better to sit for 3 minutes daily than plan on twenty and quit, or practice less frequently because you "don't have time." Use a timer, providing an audible cue, so you don't need to watch the clock.
- 2. Kindness and compassion for yourself.** It's called "practice", not "perfection." The key is to bring yourself back to your intent, without blame or judgment, each time you're distracted.

Distraction happens repeatedly, even for experienced meditators. This is the normal process of meditation. Everyone's mind wanders. The heart of practice is to be grateful when you notice, and re-focus. Some days it flows more easily, and some days you struggle. That's normal, too.

Get Started:

This simple meditation practice can be used for a lifetime. Sit comfortably. Notice your breath, where it enters your body, how it travels through your body, and how it exits. When you become distracted by thoughts or feelings, return your focus to your breath without blame or judgment. You can learn to notice what your mind does, without being "seduced" by it.

Benefits

- **Strength of mind is like strength of body.** Perseverance and repetition developed in small daily commitments strengthen us for larger challenges. When we follow through with our commitments, self-esteem improves; we experience being trustworthy. Learning to show up for practice establishes an important blueprint for other areas of our lives.
- If you are doing the same practice every day, the only element that changes is... you! Regular practice holds a mirror for you to see yourself more clearly.
- Everyone needs time to "drop anchor" each day, momentarily withdrawing from life's stresses. Meditation leaves you more energized and focused.
- Meditation lowers stress hormones, cholesterol, blood pressure, reduces heart disease, improves insulin sensitivity, and slows effects of aging.

