

Mindfulness and Health: How to Start a Meditation Practice

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Person meditating with legs crossed

The benefits of mindfulness and meditation are well-documented, but starting a regular meditation practice can seem overwhelming. Where to start? We asked two experts at the HOSPITAL Well-being Center for answers. NAME, LISW-S, and NAME, LPCC, LICDC, ATR, help employees and community members start a meditation practice to reduce anxiety and stress, improve their health, and feel more present. Here's what they had to say.

What type of meditation is best for me?

You may need to try a few different kinds of meditation before deciding what is best for you. In [Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction](#), an evidence-based program offered at HOSPITAL, several common meditation practices are introduced. They are:

- **Sitting meditation/breath awareness:** You focus your attention on the physical sensations of breathing.
- **Body scan meditation:** You pay attention to sensations in specific parts of your body.
- **Walking meditation:** You focus on the movement of each foot as you walk.
- **Yoga:** You move mindfully to connect your body, breath and mind.
- **Loving kindness:** You cultivate compassion toward yourself and others.

These are just a few ways to meditate. Your choice will depend on your goals and your preferences. NAME suggests, “You may want to practice several different types of meditation depending on how you feel on a certain day.”

How can I make time for meditation in my busy schedule?

NAME says, “This is such a common challenge when starting a meditation practice, so you are not alone! Think of ‘building’ meditation into your schedule rather than ‘fitting’ it into your schedule. Be realistic about how much time you actually have.”

There is nothing wrong with starting small. Begin with five minutes as your coffee is brewing in the morning or 10 minutes on your lunch break. Or, spend five minutes meditating in the morning and five minutes after work.

It can be helpful to make very specific plans about when and where you will practice. When you tell yourself, “I plan to meditate for 10 minutes after I eat breakfast in my living room,” you are more likely to do it than if you said, “I will meditate regularly.” NAME also says, “Give yourself grace if you miss a day. You can always begin again.”

How often should I meditate?

You may feel calmer and more at ease after one session. But just like exercise, the more you do, the better results you’ll see. The experts suggest committing to a daily practice. NAME says, “Even three minutes of meditation every day can be valuable. When you build your ‘mindfulness muscle’ and establish a routine, the benefits will add up over time.”

Is it normal for my mind to wander during meditation?

NAME answers, “Absolutely! That moment when you notice your mind wandering is the ‘magic moment’ because it’s when your mind ‘wakes up’ or becomes mindful. Essentially, you are building your mindfulness muscle.”

The purpose of mindfulness is not to “shut your mind off.” Mindfulness is learning to be present at any moment. So, when you notice your mind wandering off and can return gently to the present moment, you’ve become more mindful. And as you learn to notice your thoughts, you also learn to process them in a healthier way.

How will I know if it is working?

It can be common when starting a meditation practice to have certain expectations. Don’t get discouraged if you don’t feel amazing after every meditation. NAME says, “Mindfulness encourages you to simply ‘be with’ your experiences from moment to moment. In mindfulness, you practice being in your life fully, without judgment, with kindness and compassion. Not every session will feel relaxing or pleasant.”

Instead, ask yourself if you feel more present during meditation. Ask yourself if you are more aware of your feelings and handle stressors less reactively. These changes show your progress.

How do I get started with meditation practice?

Just do it! Starting today, set your intention to practice at a specific and consistent time and place. Meditation is available to everyone and can be done anywhere. Find a place where you feel comfortable and with minimal distractions. This place could be your home, your workplace, outdoors at a park, in a class or gym, or in your car (when it's parked!).

NAME suggests, "If it helps you to get started, find a community to practice with. Meditating with others can provide motivation. And it can be helpful to have some expert guidance when you are learning."

There are many virtual and in-person meditation groups available in central Ohio. For example, HOSPITAL offers four free virtual weekly drop-in guided meditation sessions open to the community. There are also online groups or classes and in-person community groups and classes. Or check out one of the many mindfulness and meditation apps available.

For more information on HOSPITAL's eight-week evidence-based Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program or the four-week Mindfulness-Based Short Course, email NAME