

## Meditation <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear Alice,

How do you learn to meditate?

### **Answer**

Dear Reader,

Contemplating a new skill to add to your well-being toolbox? The good news is that, in this time period, there are many ways to hone and habituate this ancient practice in your day-to-day. Meditation originated thousands of years ago as a way to connect with spiritual forces and develop a person's inner consciousness. Throughout history, many of the world's religions have incorporated some form of meditation. Today, some meditators maintain a religious connection, while others have relaxation or a sense of calm as the primary goal. Some people also find that meditation helps them to focus, cultivate new perspectives, or reduce negative feelings. Want to learn more about this ancient discipline and find out how to incorporate it into your life? Read on!

Meditation can look different for everyone, but it generally involves all or some of these components:

- Somewhere quiet with minimal distraction
- A comfortable body posture
- An object of focus (such as words, objects, ideas, sounds, or breathing)
- An openness to letting distractions ebb and flow (without judging them or yourself)

*List adapted from the [National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health](#) <sup>[2]</sup>.*

Not only can meditation contribute to feelings of well-being during a session, but its benefits can also spill over into other aspects of life. There is an ever-expanding body of evidence showing that meditation may be beneficial for a wide array of health conditions including high blood pressure, cancer treatment side effects, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), ulcerative colitis (UC), anxiety, depression, and insomnia. A mental health professional or health care provider may be able to provide some more information about meditation if you're interested in using it to support a health condition.

So, where to begin? Many universities, hospitals, gyms, and workplaces offer meditation classes as a perk for their students, employees, or clients. Meditation comes in many forms, so you can also shop around for yoga, progressive muscle relaxation, or mindfulness sessions in your area. Formal meditation retreats are also an option, although they could require a larger time commitment and a registration fee. Free and subscription-based smartphone meditation apps are available, and there is a plethora of free online meditation videos to get you in the groove.

Looking for some more meditation inspiration? Here some suggestions for getting started:

- **Deep breathing:** Take slow, deep breaths. Focus on awareness of inhalations and exhalations. If you find yourself thinking about other ideas, try to shift back to the breath.
- **Body scans:** Pay attention to different parts of your body and how they feel while you breathe deeply. You might consider imagining light or warmth in specific areas of your body.
- **Mantras:** Think of a phrase to focus on through repetition. By repeating this phrase or word, it can help prevent other thoughts that may be distracting.
- **Prayer:** Prayer is well-known example of meditation. You could create your own prayer or find one that speaks to you.
- **Reading, listening, and reflection:** You may consider reading some poetry or sacred texts. You can also listen to music, spoken words, or anything that relaxes or uplifts you. You could even write down some reflections to read later or share with someone else.
- **Love and gratitude:** Try to focus on feelings of love, compassion, or gratitude. You can close your eyes and use your imagination, or look at an image that you feel warmly towards.

*List adapted from [Mayo Clinic](#) [3].*

While meditation may be challenging at first, many people find that it gets easier with practice. There are tons of different techniques and styles of meditation you can try in order to find what works for you. Most of all — there's no correct way to meditate, so you may incorporate some self-compassion if your meditation sessions don't always go quite as planned.

Happy meditating!

Alice!

Category:

[Emotional Health](#) [4]

[Stress & Anxiety](#) [5]

[General Health](#) [6]

[Body Maintenance](#) [7]

[Holistic & Integrative Health](#) [8]

[Vitality](#) [9]

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[Inexpensive yoga classes?](#) [11]

[Health benefits of yoga](#) [12]

[Does aromatherapy work?](#) [13]

## Resources

[Counseling and Psychological Services \(CPS\) \(Morningside\)](#) [14]

[Medical Services \(Morningside\)](#) [15]

[Mental Health Services \(CUIMC\)](#) [16]

[Medical Services \(CUIMC\)](#) [17]

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## Footer menu

- ▼ [Contact Alice!](#)
  - [Content Use](#)
  - [Media Inquiries](#)
  - [Comments & Corrections](#)
- ▼ [Syndication & Licensing](#)
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### Links

[1] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/meditation-0>

[2] <https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/meditation-in-depth>

[3] <https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/meditation/in-depth/meditation/art-20045858>

[4] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/emotional-health>

- [5] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/stress-anxiety>
- [6] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/general-health>
- [7] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/body-maintenance>
- [8] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/holistic-integrative-health>
- [9] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/vitality>
- [10] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/how-reduce-stress-work-0>
- [11] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/inexpensive-yoga-classes>
- [12] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/health-benefits-yoga-0>
- [13] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/does-aromatherapy-work-0>
- [14] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/counseling-and-psychological-services-cps-morningside>
- [15] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/medical-services-morningside>
- [16] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/mental-health-services-cuimc>
- [17] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/medical-services-cuimc>