

The Body Scan Meditation

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[for audio guidance, go to [Body Scan](#)]

The body scan has proven to be an extremely powerful and healing form of meditation. It forms the core of the lying down practices that people train in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction. It involves systematically sweeping through the body with the mind, bringing an affectionate, openhearted, interested attention to its various regions, customarily starting from the toes of the left foot and then moving through the entirety of the foot – to sole, the heel, the top of the foot – then up the left leg, including in turn the ankle, the shin and the calf, the knee and the kneecap, the thigh in its entirety, on the surface and deep, the groin and the left hip, then over to the toes of the right foot, the other regions of the foot, then up the right leg in the same manner as the left. From there, the focus moves into, successively, and slowly, the entirety of the pelvic region, including the hips again, the buttocks and the genitals, the lower back, the abdomen, and then the upper torso – the upper back, the chest and the ribs, the breasts, the heart and lungs and great vessels housed within the rib cage, the shoulder blades floating on the rib cage in back, all the way up to the collarbones and shoulders. From the shoulders, we move to the arms, often doing them together, starting from the tips of the fingers and thumbs and moving successively through the fingers, the palms, and backs of the hands, the wrists, forearms, elbows, upper arms, armpits, and shoulders again. Then we move in to the neck and throat, and finally, the face and head...

When we practice the body scan, we are systematically and intentionally moving our attention through the body, attending to the various sensations in the different regions. That we can attend to these body sensations at all is quite remarkable. That we can do it at will, either impulsively or in a more disciplined systematic way, is even more so. Without moving a muscle, we can put our mind anywhere in the body we choose and feel and be aware of whatever sensations are present in that moment.

Experientially, we might describe what we are doing during a body scan as *tuning in* or *opening* to those sensations, allowing ourselves to become aware of what is already unfolding, much of which we usually tune out because it is so obvious, so mundane, so familiar that we hardly know it is there, I mean here. And of course, by the same token we could say that most of the time in our lives we hardly know we are there, I mean here, experiencing the body, in the body, of the body . . . the words actually fail the essence of the experience. When we speak about it, as we've already observed, language itself forces us to speak of a separate I who "has" a body. We wind up sounding hopelessly dualistic.

And yet, in a way there certainly is a separate I who "has" a body, or at least, there is a very strong appearance of that being the case, and we have spoken of this as being the level of conventional reality, the relative, the level of appearances. In the domain of relative reality, there is the body and its sensations (object), and there is the perceiver of the sensations (subject). They appear separate and different.

Then there are moments of pure perceiving that arise sometimes in meditation practice, and sometimes at other very special moments in life. Yet such moments are potentially available to us at all times, since they are attributes of awareness itself. Perceiving unifies the apparent subject and apparent object in the experiencing itself. Subject and object dissolve into awareness. Awareness is larger than sensation. It has a life of its own separate from the life of the body, yet intimately dependent on it.

Awareness is deeply bereft, however, when it does not have a full body to work with due to disease or injury to the nervous system itself. The intact nervous system provides us with all of our extraordinary gateways into the feeling, sensing world. Yet. Like most everything else, we take these capacities so much for granted that we hardly notice that every exquisite moment of our life in relationship, both inwardly and outwardly, depends on them. Not only might we come more to our senses, we might realize that we only know through our senses, if you include the mind, or awareness itself as a sense – you could say, the ultimate sense. . .

It is not uncommon while practicing the body scan for the sensations in the body to be felt more acutely, even for there to be more pain, a greater intensity of sensation in certain regions. At the same time, in the context of mindfulness practice, the sensations, whatever they are and however intense, are also being *met* more accurately too, with less overlay of interpretation, judgment and reaction, including aversion and the impulse to run, to escape.

In the body scan, we are developing a greater intimacy with bare sensation, opening to the give-and-take embedded in the reciprocity between the sensations themselves and our awareness of them. As a result, it is not uncommon to be less disturbed by them, or disturbed by them in a different, a wiser way, even when they are acute. Awareness learns to let them be as they are and to hold them without triggering so much emotional reactivity and also so much inflamed thinking about them. We sometimes speak of awareness and discernment differentiating and perhaps naturally “uncoupling” the sensory dimension of the experience of pain from the emotional and cognitive dimensions of pain. In the process, the intensity of the sensations themselves can sometimes subside. In any event, they may come to be seen as less onerous, less debilitating.

It seems as if awareness itself, holding the sensations without judging them or reacting to them, is healing our view of the body and allowing it to come to terms, at least to some degree, with conditions as they are in the present moment in ways that no longer overwhelmingly erode our quality of life, even in the fact of pain or disease. The awareness of pain really is a different realm from being caught up in pain and struggling with it, and setting foot in that realm, we discover some succor and respite. This in itself is an experience of liberation, a profound freedom in that moment, at least from a narrower way of holding the experience of pain when it is not seen as bare sensation. It is not a cure by any means, but it is a learning and an opening, and an accepting, and a navigating the ups and downs of what previously was impenetrable and unworkable. . .

Paraphrasing James Joyce in one of his short stories in *Dubliners*, “Mr. Duffy lived a short distance from his body.” That may be an address too many of us share. Taking the miracle of embodiment for granted is a horrific loss. It would be a profound healing of our lives to get back in touch with it. All it takes is practice in coming to our senses, all of them.

And . . . a spirit of adventure. . .

. . . The body scan is not for everybody, and it is not always the meditation of choice even for those who love it. But it is extremely useful and good to know about and practice from time to time, whatever your circumstances or condition. If you think of your body as a musical instrument, the body scan is a way of tuning it. If you think of it as a universe, the body scan is a way to come to know it. If you think of your body as a house, the body scan is a way to throw open all the windows and doors and let the fresh air of awareness sweep it clean.

You can also scan your body much more quickly, depending on your time constraints and the situation you find yourself in. You can do a one in-breath or one out-breath body scan, or a one-, two-, five-, ten-, or twenty-minute body scan. The level of precision and detail will of course vary depending on how

quickly you move through the body, but each speed has its virtues, and ultimately, it is about being in touch with the whole of your being and your body in any and every way you can, outside of time altogether.

You can practice body scans, long or short, lying in bed at night or in the morning. You can also practice them sitting or even standing. There are countless creative ways to bring the body scan or any other lying down meditation into your life. If you make use of any of them, it is highly likely that you will find that they will bring new life to you, and bring you to a new appreciation for your body and how much it can serve as a vehicle for embodying here and now what is deepest and best in yourself, including your dignity, your beauty, your vitality, and your mind when it is open and undisturbed.

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Physical sensations you might notice with the body scan

- tingly
- tight/loose
- soft/rough
- stiff/flexible
- airy/dense
- burning
- shooting
- prickly
- numb
- shaky
- pounding
- stinging
- pulling
- pulsing
- itchy
- throbbing
- airy
- dull/sharp
- achy
- trembling
- cutting
- vibrating
- sinking
- light/heavy
- tense/relaxed
- cool/warm
- clammy/dry

Emotional reactions you might notice

- impatience/wanting to stop
- sadness
- anger
- enjoyment
- boredom
- release
- joy
- fear
- grief
- pride
- disgust
- surprise
- frustration
- anticipation
- shame

Thoughts that may occur

- reviewing the past
- planning
- wishing/hoping/comparing
- imagining the future
- evaluating/analyzing
- labeling/cataloguing
- thinking about others
- circular thinking
- judging your experience

NOTE: If, at any point, you experience too much discomfort, become panicky or scared, stay with your breath until you feel better. If things are still too much, try opening your eyes, looking around the room to orient yourself, maybe looking at something that is comforting or soothing to you (a favorite piece of art or photo of a loved one or pet). You may even want to reach out to a friend, take a walk, have a cup of tea. Taking care of yourself, even if it means interrupting the process, is mindfulness in action. If the net effect of this practice is that you are feeling overwhelmed with emotion, see [I have strong emotional \(or physical\) reactions](#).

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7 Myths of Meditation

by Deepak Chopra

In the past 40 years, meditation has entered the mainstream of modern Western culture, and been prescribed by physicians and practiced by everyone from business executives, artists, and scientists to students, teachers, military personnel, and -- on a promising note -- politicians. Ohio Congressman Tim Ryan meditates every morning and has become a major advocate of mindfulness and meditation, as he describes in his book, *A Mindful Nation: How a Simple Practice Can Help Us Reduce Stress, Improve Performance, and Recapture the American Spirit*.

Despite the growing popularity of meditation, prevailing misconceptions about the practice are a barrier that prevents many people from trying meditation and receiving its profound benefits for the body, mind, and spirit. Here are seven of the most common meditation myths, dispelled.

Myth #1: Meditation is difficult.

Truth: This myth is rooted in the image of meditation as an esoteric practice reserved only for saints, holy men, and spiritual adepts. In reality, when you receive instruction from an experienced, knowledgeable teacher, meditation is easy and fun to learn. The techniques can be as simple as focusing on the breath or silently repeating a mantra. One reason why meditation may seem difficult is that we try too hard to concentrate, we're overly attached to results, or we're not sure we are doing it right. In our experience at the Chopra Center, learning meditation from a qualified teacher is the best way to ensure that the process is enjoyable and you get the most from your practice. A teacher will help you understand what you're experiencing, move past common roadblocks, and create a nourishing daily practice.

Myth #2: You have to quiet your mind in order to have a successful meditation practice.

Truth: This may be the number one myth about meditation and is the cause of many people giving up in frustration. Meditation isn't about stopping our thoughts or trying to empty our mind -- both of these approaches only create stress and more noisy internal chatter. We can't stop or control our thoughts, but we *can* decide how much attention to give them. Although we can't impose quiet on our mind, through meditation we can find the quiet that already exists in the space between our thoughts. Sometimes referred to as "the gap," this space between thoughts is pure consciousness, pure silence, and pure peace.

When we meditate, we use an object of attention, such as our breath, an image, or a mantra, which allows our mind to relax into this silent stream of awareness. When thoughts arise, as they inevitably will, we don't need to judge them or try to push them away. Instead, we gently return our attention to our object of attention. In every meditation, there are moments, even if only microseconds, when the mind dips into the gap and experiences the refreshment of pure awareness. As you meditate on a regular basis, you will spend more and more time in this state of expanded awareness and silence.

Be assured that even if it feels like you have been thinking throughout your entire meditation, you are still receiving the benefits of your practice. You haven't failed or wasted your time. When my friend and colleague David Simon taught meditation, he would often tell students, "The thought

I'm having thoughts may be the most important thought you have ever thought, because before you had that thought, you may not have even known you were having thoughts. You probably thought you *were* your thoughts." Simply noticing that you are having thoughts is a breakthrough because it begins to shift your internal reference point from ego mind to witnessing awareness. As you become less identified with your thoughts and stories, you experience greater peace and open to new possibilities.

Myth #3: It takes years of dedicated practice to receive any benefits from meditation.

Truth: The benefits of meditation are both immediate and long-term. You can begin to experience benefits the first time you sit down to meditate and in the first few days of daily practice. Many scientific studies provide evidence that meditation has profound effects on the mind-body physiology within just weeks of practice. For example, a [landmark study](#) led by Harvard University and Massachusetts General Hospital found that as little as eight weeks of meditation not only helped people experience decreased anxiety and greater feelings of calm; it also produced growth in the areas of the brain associated with memory, empathy, sense of self, and stress regulation.

At the Chopra Center, we commonly hear from new meditators who are able to sleep soundly for the first time in years after just a few days of daily meditation practice. Other common [benefits of meditation](#) include improved concentration, decreased blood pressure, reduced stress and anxiety, and enhanced immune function. You can learn more about the benefits of meditation in a recent post, "[Why Meditate?](#)" on the Chopra Center blog.

Myth #4: Meditation is escapism.

Truth: The real purpose of meditation isn't to tune out and get away from it all but to tune in and get in touch with your true self -- that eternal aspect of yourself that goes beyond all the ever-changing, external circumstances of your life. In meditation you dive below the mind's churning surface, which tends to be filled with repetitive thoughts about the past and worries about the future, into the still point of pure consciousness. In this state of transcendent awareness, you let go of all the stories you've been telling yourself about who you are, what is limiting you, and where you fall short -- and you experience the truth that your deepest self is infinite and unbounded.

As you practice on a regular basis, you cleanse the windows of perception and your clarity expands. While some people do try to use meditation as a form of escape -- as a way to bypass unresolved emotional issues -- this approach runs counter to all of the wisdom teachings about meditation and mindfulness. In fact, there are a variety of meditation techniques specifically developed to identify, mobilize and release stored emotional toxicity. If you are coping with emotional upset or trauma, I recommend that you work with a therapist who can help you safely explore and heal the pain of the past, allowing you to return to your natural state of wholeness and love.

Myth #5: I don't have enough time to meditate.

Truth: There are busy, productive executives who have not missed a meditation in 25 years, and if you make meditation a priority, you will do it. If you feel like your schedule is too full, remember that even just a few minutes of meditation is better than none. We encourage you not to talk yourself out of meditating just because it's a bit late or you feel too sleepy.

In life's paradoxical way, when we spend time meditating on a regular basis, we actually have more time. When we meditate, we dip in and out of the timeless, spaceless realm of consciousness... the state of pure awareness that is the source of everything that manifests in the universe. Our breathing and heart rate slow down, our blood pressure lowers, and our body decreases the production of stress hormones and other chemicals that speed up the [aging process](#) and give us the subjective feeling that we are "running out of time."

when the mind and body will be rested. She is still feeling lonely, although less so within the awareness of all the beings whose life energy brought her the chips, eggs, cheese, and greens. She decides to call her husband to say good night. She goes to bed with body, mind, and heart at ease and sleeps soundly.

Mindful eating is a way to rediscover one of the most pleasurable things we do as human beings. It also is a path to uncovering many wonderful activities going on right under our noses and within our own bodies. Mindful eating has the unexpected benefit of helping us tap into our body's natural wisdom and our heart's natural capacity for openness and gratitude. We ask ourselves questions like:

Am I hungry?

Where do I feel hunger?

What part of me is hungry?

What do I really crave?

What am I tasting just now?

These are very simple questions, but we seldom pose them.

Mindfulness Is the Best Flavoring

As I write this I am eating a lemon tart that a friend gave to me. After writing for a few hours I'm ready to reward myself with a tart. The first bite is delicious. Creamy, sweet-sour, melting. When I take the second bite, I think about what to write next. The flavor in my mouth decreases. I take another bite and get up to sharpen a pencil. As I walk, I notice I am chewing, but there is almost no lemon flavor in this third bite. I sit down, get to work, and wait a few minutes.

Then I take a fourth bite, fully focused on the smells, tastes, and touch sensations in my mouth.

Delicious, again! I discover, all over again (I'm a slow learner) that the only way to keep that "first bite" experience, to honor the gift my friend gave me, is to eat slowly, with long pauses between bites. If I do anything else while I'm eating—if I talk, walk, write, or even think—the flavor diminishes or disappears. The life is drained from my beautiful tart. I could be eating the cardboard box.

Here's the humorous part. I stopped tasting the lemon tart because I was thinking. About what? Mindful eating! Discovering that, I grin. To be a human being is both pitiful and funny.

Why can't I think, walk, and be aware of the taste of the tart at the same time? I can't do all these at once because the mind has two distinct functions, thinking and awareness. When the thinking is turned up, the awareness is turned down. When the thinking function is going full throttle, we can eat an entire meal, an entire cake, an entire carton of ice cream, and not taste more than a bite or two. When we don't taste, we can end up stuffed to the gills but feeling completely unsatisfied. This is because the mind and mouth weren't present, weren't tasting or enjoying, as we ate. The stomach became full but the mind and mouth were unfulfilled and continued calling for us to eat.

If we don't feel satisfied, we'll begin to look around for something more or something different to eat. Everyone has had the experience of roaming the kitchen, opening cupboards and doors, looking vainly for something, anything, to satisfy. The only thing that will cure this, a fundamental kind of hunger, is to sit down and be, even for a few minutes, wholly present.

If we eat and stay connected with our experience and with the people who grew and cooked the food, who served the food, and who eat along-side us, we will feel most satisfied, even with a meager meal. This is the gift of mindful eating, to restore our sense of satisfaction no matter what we are or are not eating.

Jan Chozen Bays is a pediatrician, mother, wife, and longtime meditation teacher. She is the author of Mindful Eating: A Guide to Rediscovering a Healthy and Joyful Relationship with Food.

Mouthfuls of Mindfulness

by Jan Chozen Bays



Photo (c) flicker.com/Debra Roby

Overeat, undereat, or just feel conflicted about how you eat? Mindfulness practice, says physician Jan Chozen Bays, can help you have a healthy and joyful relationship with food.

Mindful eating is not directed by charts, tables, pyramids, or scales. It is not dictated by an expert. It is directed by your own inner experiences, moment by moment. Your experience is unique. Therefore you are the expert. In the process of learning to eat mindfully, we replace self-criticism with self-nurturing, anxiety with curiosity, and shame with respect for your own inner wisdom.

Let's take a typical experience. On the way home from work Sally thinks with dread about the talk she needs to work on for a big conference. Before starting to work on the speech, however, she decides to relax and watch a few minutes of TV. She sits down with a bag of chips. At first she eats only a few, but as the show gets more dramatic, she eats faster and faster. When the show ends she looks down and realizes she's eaten the entire bag. She scolds herself for wasting time and for eating junk food. "Too much salt and fat! No dinner for you!" Engrossed in the drama on the screen, covering up her anxiety about procrastinating, she ignored what was happening in her mind, heart, mouth, and stomach. She ate unconsciously. She ate to go unconscious. She goes to bed unnourished

in body or heart and with her mind still anxious about the talk.

The next time this happens she decides to eat chips but to try eating them mindfully. First she checks in with her mind. She finds her mind is worried about an article she promised to write. Her mind says she needs to get started on it to-night. She checks in with her heart and finds she is feeling a little lonely because her husband is out of town. She checks in with her stomach and body and discovers she is both hungry and tired. She needs some nurturing. The only one at home to do it is herself.

Throwing a Small Party

She decides to treat herself to a small chip party. (Remember, mindful eating gives us permission to play with our food.) She takes twenty chips out of the bag and arranges them on a plate. She looks at their color and shape. She eats one chip, savoring its flavor. She pauses, then eats another. There is no judgment, no right or wrong. She is simply seeing the shades of tan and brown on each curved surface, tasting the tang of salt, hearing the crunch of each bite, feeling the crisp texture melt into softness. She ponders how these chips arrived on her plate, aware of the sun, the soil, the rain, the potato farmer, the workers at the chip factory, the delivery truck driver, the grocer who stocked the shelves and sold them to her.

With little pauses between each chip, it takes ten minutes for the chip party. When she finishes, she checks in with her body to find out if any part of it is still hungry.

She finds her mouth and cells are thirsty, so she gets a drink of orange juice. Her body is also saying it needs some protein and something green, so she makes a cheese omelet and a spinach salad. After eating she checks in again with her mind, body, and heart. The heart and body feel nourished but the mind is still tired. She decides to go to bed and work on the talk first thing in the morning,

becomes quieter, more joyful, despite whatever distraction there may be.

5. I don't see the benefit.

Unfortunately, this is where you have to take our word for it. Some people get how beneficial meditation is after just one session, but most of us take longer – you might notice a difference after a week, or maybe two of daily practice. Which means you have to trust the process enough to hang in there and keep going, even before you get the benefits.

Remember, music needs to be played for hours to get the notes right, while in Japan it can take 12 years to learn how to arrange flowers. Being still happens in a moment, but it may take some time before that moment comes—hence the need for patience.

6. I'm no good at this. I never get it right.

Actually, it's impossible to fail at meditation. Even if you sit for 20 minutes thinking non-stop meaningless thoughts, that's fine. There is no right or wrong, and there's no special technique. Deb's meditation teacher told her there are as many forms of meditation as there are people who practice it. So all you need do is find the way that works for you (even if you prefer to do it standing on your head) and keep at it.

The important point is that you make friends with meditation. It'll be of no help at all if you feel you have to meditate, for instance, and then feel guilty if you miss the allotted time or only do 10 minutes when you had promised to do 30. It is much better to practice for a just a sort time and to enjoy what you are doing than to sit there, teeth gritted, because you've been told that only 30 or even 40 minutes will have any affect. Meditation is

a companion to have throughout life, like an old friend you turn to when in need of support, inspiration, and clarity. It is to be enjoyed!

7. It's all just weird New Age hype.

It's certainly easy to get lost in the array of New Age promises of eternal happiness but meditation itself is as old as the hills. More than 2,500 years ago the Buddha was a dedicated meditator who tried and tested numerous different ways of enabling the mind to be quiet. And that's just one example. Each religion has its own variation on the theme, and all stretch back over the centuries. So nothing new here, and nothing weird.

In other words, meditation is not about forcing the mind to be absolutely still. Rather, it's a letting go of resistance, of whatever may arise: doubt, worry, uncertainty and feeling inadequate, the endless dramas, fear and desire. Every time you find your mind is drifting, daydreaming, remembering the past or planning ahead, just come back to now, come back to this moment. All you need do is pay attention and be with what is. Nothing else.

Ed and Deb Shapiro are featured bloggers at Oprah.com and HuffingtonPost.com. See their award-winning book: *BE THE CHANGE, How Meditation Can Transform You and the World*, with forewords by the Dalai Lama and Robert Thurman, with contributors Jack Kornfield, Jon Kabat-Zinn, Jane Fonda, Ram Dass, Byron Katie, and many others. They also have 3 meditation CDs: *Metta—Loving kindness and Forgiveness*; *Samadhi—Breath Awareness and Insight*; and *Yoga Nidra—Inner Conscious Relaxation*; which are available at: EdandDebShapiro.com

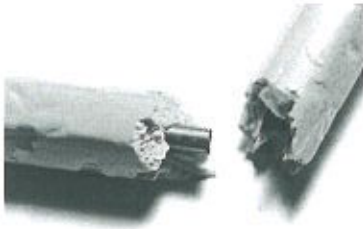
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source: <http://www.mindful.org/why-we-find-it-hard-to-meditate/>

Why We Find It Hard to Meditate

Ed and Deb Shapiro explore common reasons and obstacles.

by Mindful Staff



What is it about something as simple as sitting still and watching our breath that evokes panic, fear, and even hostility? No matter how many reports there are proving the mental, emotional, and physical value of being quiet, there seems to be an even greater number who refuse to give it a try.

Meditation can certainly be challenging, and even more so if we are uncertain as to why we are doing it. It can seem very odd to sit there just listening to the incessant chatter in our head, and we easily get bored if we do nothing for too long, even if it's only 10 minutes.

After years of hearing a plethora of reasons why people find it hard to meditate, we have whittled it down to just a few:

1. I'm too busy, I don't have the time.

Which can certainly be true if you have young children and a full-time job, and all that these entail. However, we are only talking about maybe 10 minutes a day. Most of us spend more time than that reading the newspaper or idly surfing the web. It only appears like we don't have the time because we usually fill every moment with activity and never press the pause button.

2. I find it really uncomfortable to sit still for too long.

If you are trying to sit cross-legged on the floor then, yes, it will get uncomfortable. But you can sit upright in a firm and comfortable chair instead. Or, you can do walking meditation, or yoga, or tai chi. Moving meditation can be just as beneficial as sitting.

3. My mind won't stop thinking: *I can't relax. I can't meditate. I just can't! My mind will not get quiet; it flies all over the place! My thoughts are driving me mad! I'm trying to get away from myself, not look inside. Sound familiar?*

Surprisingly enough, trying to stop your mind from thinking is like trying to stop the wind – it's impossible. In the Eastern teaching the mind is described as being like a drunken monkey bitten by a scorpion because, just as a monkey leaps from branch to branch, so the mind leaps from one thing to another, constantly distracted and busy. So, when you come to sit still and try to quiet your mind, you find all this manic activity going on and it seems insanely noisy. It is actually nothing new, just that now you are becoming aware of it, whereas before you were immersed in it, unaware that such chatter was so constant.

This experience of the mind being so busy is very normal. Someone once estimated that in any one thirty-minute session of meditation we may have upward of three hundred thoughts. Years of busy mind, years of creating and maintaining dramas, years of stresses and confusion and self-centeredness, and the mind has no idea how to be still. Rather, it craves entertainment. It's not as if you can suddenly turn it off when you meditate, it just means you are like everyone else.

4. There are too many distractions, it's too noisy.

Gone are the days when we could disappear into a cave and be left undisturbed until we emerged some time later fully enlightened. Instead, we all have to deal with the sounds and impositions of the world around us. But – and it's a big but – we needn't let it impose. Cars going by outside? Fine. Let them go by, but just don't go with them. The quiet you are looking for is inside, not outside. The experience of stillness is accumulative: The more you sit, then slowly, slowly, the mind

In meditation, we are in a state of restful alertness that is extremely refreshing for the body and mind. As people stick with their meditation ritual, they notice that they are able to accomplish more while doing less. Instead of struggling so hard to achieve goals, they spend more and more time "in the flow" -- aligned with universal intelligence that orchestrates everything.

Myth #6: Meditation requires spiritual or religious beliefs.

Truth: Meditation is a practice that takes us beyond the noisy chatter of the mind into stillness and silence. It doesn't require a specific spiritual belief, and many people of many different religions practice meditation without any conflict with their current religious beliefs. Some meditators have no particular religious beliefs, or are atheist or agnostic. They meditate in order to experience inner quiet and the numerous physical and mental health benefits of the practice -- including lowered blood pressure, stress reduction, and restful sleep. The original reason that I started meditating was to help myself stop smoking. Meditation helps us to enrich our lives. It enables us to enjoy whatever we do in our lives more fully and happily -- whether that is playing sports, taking care of our children, or advancing in our career.

Myth #7: I'm supposed to have transcendent experiences in meditation.

Truth: Some people are disappointed when they don't experience visions, see colors, levitate, hear a choir of angels, or glimpse enlightenment when they meditate. Although we can have a variety of wonderful experiences when we meditate, including feelings of bliss and oneness, these aren't the purpose of the practice. The real benefits of meditation are what happens in the other hours of the day when we're going about our daily lives. When we emerge from our meditation session, we carry some of the stillness and silence of our practice with us, allowing us to be more creative, compassionate, centered, and loving to ourselves and everyone we encounter.

As you begin or continue your meditation journey, here are some other guidelines that may help you on your way:

- Have no expectations. Sometimes the mind is too active to settle down. Sometimes it settles down immediately. Sometimes it goes quiet, but the person doesn't notice. Anything can happen.
- Be easy with yourself. Meditation isn't about getting it right or wrong. It's about letting your mind find its true nature.
- Don't stick with meditation techniques that aren't leading to inner silence. Find a technique that resonates with you. There are many kinds of mantra meditation, including the Primordial Sound Meditation practice taught at the Chopra Center. Or simply follow the in and out of your breathing, not paying attention to your thoughts at all. The mind wants to find its source in silence. Give it a chance by letting go.
- Make sure you are alone in a quiet place to meditate. Unplug the phone. Make sure no one is going to disturb you.
- Really be there. If your attention is somewhere else, thinking about your next appointment, errand or meal, of course you won't find silence. To meditate, your intention must be clear and free of other obligations.

Deepak Chopra is co-author of Super Brain: Unleashing the Explosive Power of Your Mind to Maximize Health, Happiness, and Spiritual Well-Being and founder of The Chopra Foundation

source: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/deepak-chopra/meditation-myths_b_2823629.html