

Modern Meditation FAQs

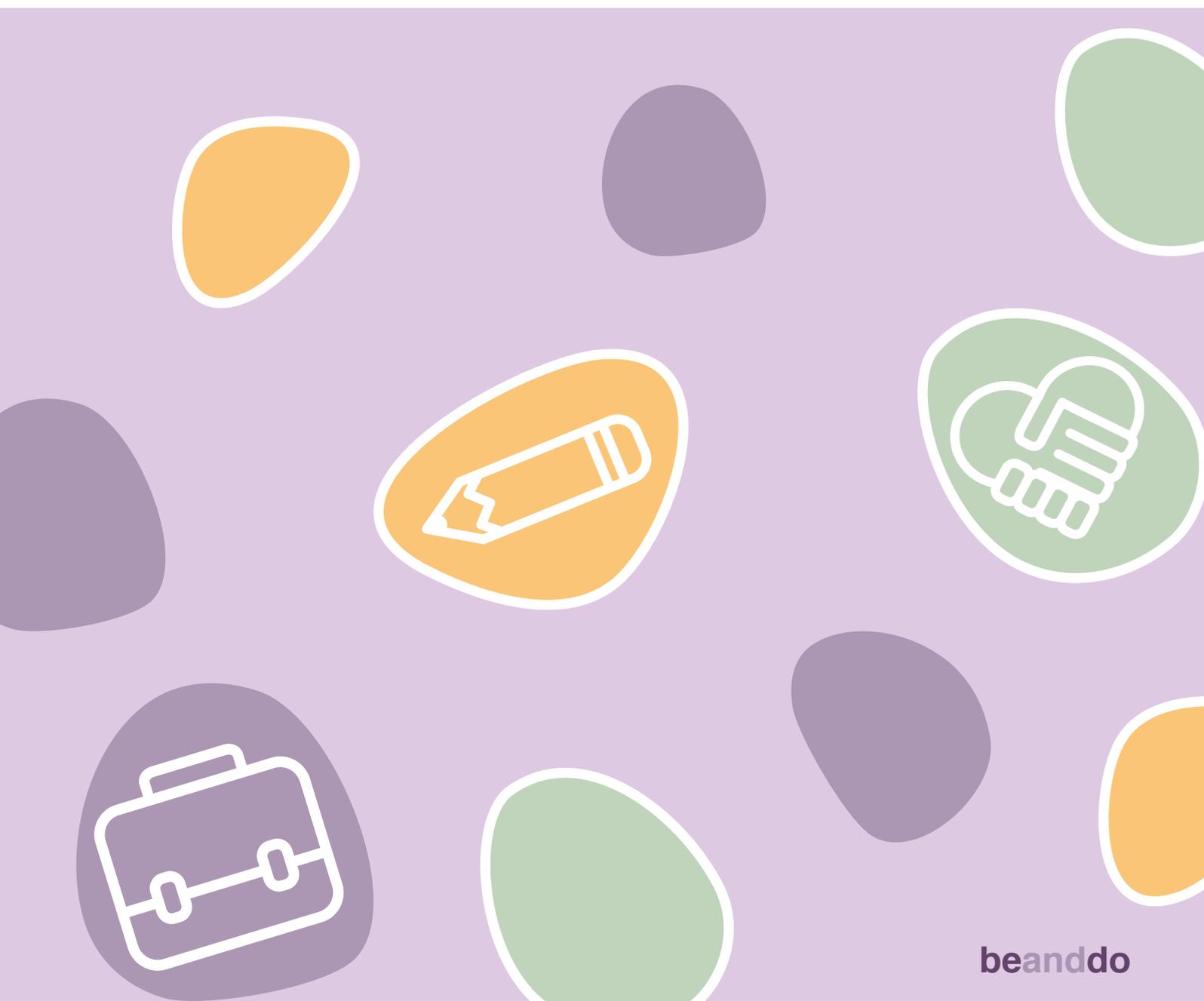
The **beanddo** guide on how to establish an effective meditation practice



“Meditation...it’s the bliss that comes with experiencing not mere happiness but complete satisfaction with the way things are. These are our moments of supreme quiet, total acceptance, and non-judgment. The wondrous intervals when we know we are in the right place, doing precisely what we’re supposed to be doing.”

From The Essential Wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita: Ancient Truths for Our Modern World, Jack Hawley (2006)

1. Making a Start



What do I need to start meditation practice?

The good news is, very little.

As long as you have a mind, body, breath and senses, a comfortable chair to sit in and a reasonably quiet place to practice, you are ready to go. The beauty of meditation is you already have everything you need.

With **beanddo** modern meditation there are no special postures to master, breathing techniques to learn or mantras to memorise.

You can read about meditation or you can use an app. But you will need to go to a good teacher. It's been done like that for thousands of years. Meditation, like deep relaxation, is something that you do; it's not something that is done to you.

When should I start?

Right here, right now.

No really; learning to meditate is a lot like learning to swim. You can read numerous books on swimming but until you get into the water you will never know what it's really like. It's exactly the same with meditation. The knowing of it and the learning of it is in the doing of it – so don't hesitate, don't think too much about it, jump in and start swimming.

And just like swimming you feel your way into it; you can't rush it. And like swimming it's a whole body and mind experience. You just know when you get it. Get a good teacher, keep practicing and it will happen.

How should I start?

By remembering what brought you to this point. What did you want to change – and why? Once you answer this, make it your intention to commit to your practice. Start with settling into your surroundings, into your chair and then into your body.

If you're unsure, don't worry, that's normal (and it will get easier with practice). Recall your intention and connect your body and mind to the present moment. Mentally, say to yourself:

This is it!

There is nowhere else to go.

There is nothing else to do.

I am exactly where I am supposed to be.

Doing exactly what I am supposed to be doing.

This is it!

To get the most from your practice make it your intention to:

- Lean in
- Be open
- Look with curiosity
- Don't try too hard
- Your experience is your experience
- There is no right or wrong way – just your way

How long should I meditate for?

Before you start, decide how long you want to practice for. If you are a beginner you may want to try meditating for five or 10 minutes at a time. There are no targets to hit but try to aim for 20 minutes twice a day before breakfast and your evening meal. This may sound challenging but you will be surprised to find that you do have time if you plan for it.

You can extend the time you sit incrementally, but don't rush. You will find that once you get into your practice, time length will not be a concern as time perception drops away.

Don't worry if you miss a session. Accepting things as they are when they happen is key to meditation; simply look forward to your next session.

To stop you from worrying about how long you've been meditating, set a timer. Most smartphones have one, or you can download a meditation timer app. Successfully practicing for a committed length of time will greatly increase your confidence.

This is not true for everyone but you may find that morning meditation is easier to do as the mind is calmer. In the evening, the mind and body can be agitated, irritated or more tired, making your practice more challenging – which is why you need to practice regularly.

Do I need to meditate in a special place?

Not particularly.

However, try and meditate regularly in a space that has good natural light and airflow. If you can, try and sit by a window although this is not vital. The important thing is to be in a space where you won't be disturbed. It doesn't need to be soundproof as occasional background sounds such as a passing aeroplane, traffic or wind are fine and sometimes beneficial. Sound can be used as a meditation object, as long as it's not too intrusive. Overheard human voices will be a distraction though.

If you can, try and make a space for regular practice. Keep a special chair, have a nearby shelf with a selection of meaningful objects on it such as photographs, books or souvenirs from your favourite places. Creating a little space like this for your meditation will help you settle and focus inwards, strengthen your intention and lend a deeper significance to your practice.

The **beanddo** Modern Meditation techniques stress the application of meditation practice in daily life. After a while you will be able to meditate anywhere and make everything you do a meditation.

What sort of posture should I adopt?

First and foremost, a comfortable one. As meditation starts with the body a good comfortable, purposeful posture will set conditions for meditation.

If you have practiced yoga postures for years then you will have no trouble sitting cross-legged on a zafu (a meditation cushion) on the floor with your back reasonably straight and unsupported. This is not a prerequisite for meditation practice as a chair is just as effective.

In meditation you will need to 'hold' your mind-body in a state of relaxed, effortless, ready alertness and awareness. This might sound like a contradiction but it can be developed by being conscious of your posture, particularly at the start.

Getting settled into position

Take off your shoes and sit with both feet flat on the floor. If you can't reach the floor use a cushion or foot rest. Position the lower back into the angle of the chair with the upper back held upright away from the chair back. Please don't strain; pay particular attention to keeping the spine and body upright but not held in tension, just relaxed and 'stacked' gently upright.

If you need to change posture because of discomfort, do so slowly and mindfully, observing the intention to move before shifting the body.

Relax the shoulders, face, mouth, tongue and jaw. Extend the back of the neck slightly and tuck the chin inwards a little. Close the eyes.

Position the hands into the lap in Cosmic Mudra. Place the right hand into the palm of the left hand with the thumbs gently pressed together. Relax the arms and hands and let them fall into the lap.

Close your eyes. An alternative is to partially close the eyelids so that a little light can come in. This will help you to not fall asleep, while also helping you to focus attention on the space between your eyebrows.

Do not practice meditation lying down, as it is very easy to fall asleep and inhibits the ability to build mind/body awareness.

Do not meditate on a full stomach.

What do I wear?

You don't need anything special.

Comfortable, everyday clothes are fine. If you are in the office you might want to loosen your tie and remove your jacket, remembering to always take off your shoes. If you wear glasses you might want to remove them. Some people also like to remove watches and jewellery, so do whatever feels right for you.

If you practice on a hard chair it's often a good idea to have a cushion available to sit on or place in your lower back. Being comfortable so that you can build your awareness is the main requirement.

What should I do at the end of my practice?

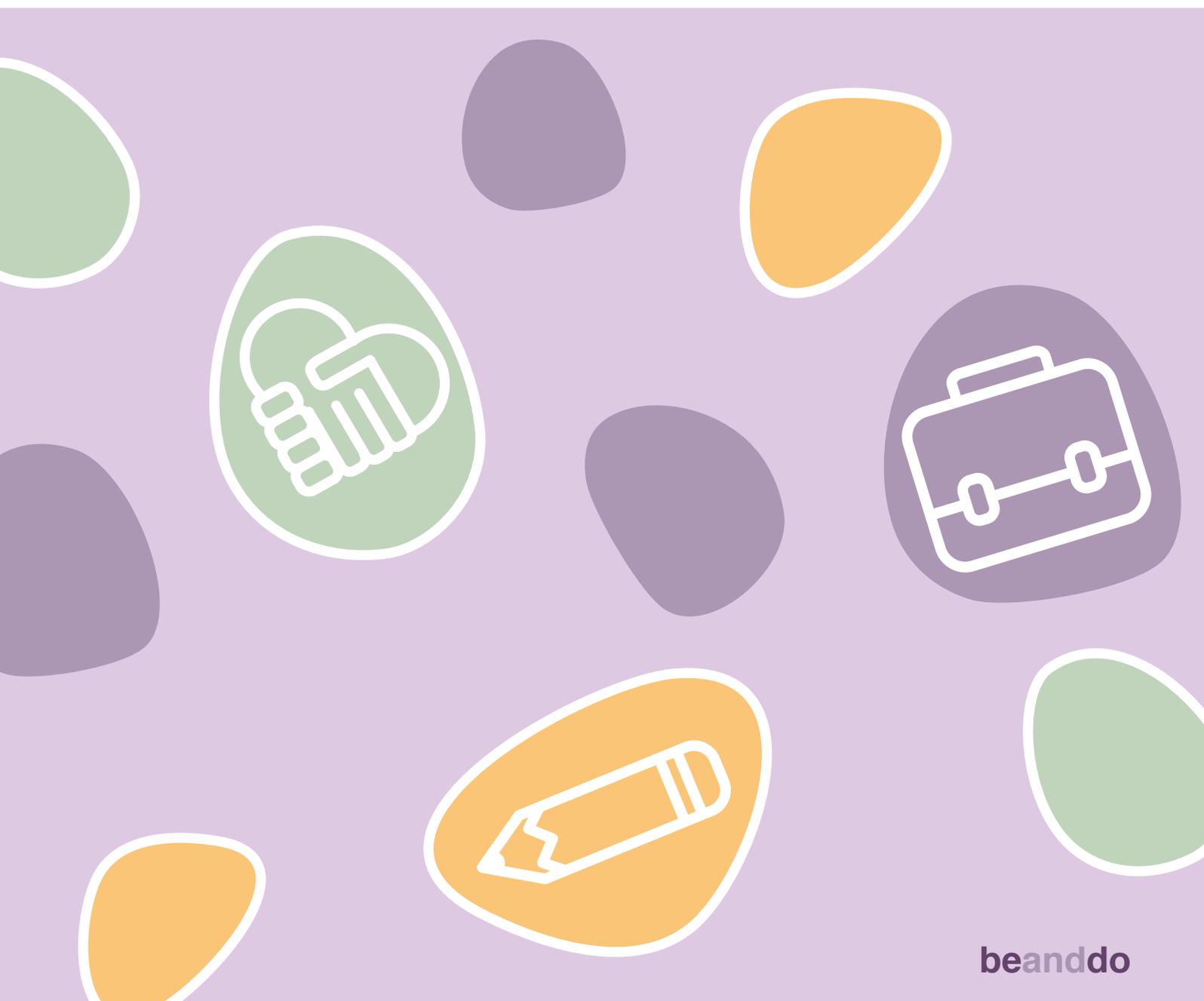
Take your time.

Gently open your eyes. Try not to focus on anything in particular, just allow the light in as you raise your eyelids.

Sit quietly for a few moments; don't rush to get up straight away. This is a moment to enjoy how the world comes back to you bit by bit.

If something particular came up in your meditation practice, just acknowledge it for a few moments, rather than dwell on it. If it's important, write it down. It's often a good idea to keep a notebook and pen handy. Just notice how you feel, make a mental note and try to maintain it for as long as you can before you become distracted by the next event of the day.

2. Some Key Principles



What will it feel like?

This is a difficult question to answer, as the experience will be different for everyone.

Meditation is easy and natural and scientists are now realising that our brains seem to be hardwired towards developing the benefits of meditation. You may have noticed in the past when, in your still quiet moments, you felt an open-flowing awareness, sudden flashes of insight or feelings of being, present, whole and centred. They just arise as if from nowhere, combined with moments of happiness and joy not connected to anything external.

You may then have let those experiences pass or fall away without paying much attention, as you became distracted by something happening externally.

Meditation is a technique for sustaining that deeper experience by focusing and holding your attention inwards, towards that pure-flowing awareness.

It's a subtle, intuitive experience but after a while that flowing, joyful feeling will stay with you and you can learn to switch it on whenever you want. Humans have been practicing it for well over 5000 years. It's tried and tested and it works!

What is meant by stopping and checking in?

Being here now!

Stopping and checking in is a way to help focus and prepare the ground for meditation practice. Treat it like a personal 'threshold', a point at which the day's events, planned or past, are put to one side in favour of being here now and ready for meditation.

Be aware of your mood as you begin to practice. As your increase awareness emerges, use it to help you direct your attention inwards towards your stillness, no matter how hard it feels. Don't feel despondent on the days it feels as though little progress has been made or you feel you just don't get it. Persevere; it works.

What is a meditation object?

Meditation objects are event and experiential phenomena that rise and fall or pass through your awareness. When we change our relationship to them through meditation practice, our expansive awareness unfolds. Objects are essentially everything that is not your awareness.

All objects are said to be 'known' while your awareness is the 'knower'. Meditation science says that we are ultimately not our mind, body, action or experience. They belong to us but they are not us. When we know this we can learn to watch and witness everything that happens in our mind and the world around us as objects, allowing us to change our relationship to what we see, feel and do by cultivating non-attachment or non-judgement.

Objects are the body, breath, sensation, hearing, thinking and any action.

With practice you will begin to feel relaxed, still and very present by being able to 'switch-on' this body awareness at any time.

What is meant by 'following my breath'?

Like the body, the breath is a useful meditation object because it's always present. To follow the breath means to be aware of it, watch and monitor it but not seek to alter or change it in any way. You need to let go and relax, allowing the breath to be just as it is. This will take practice because as we direct our attention to the breath, the mind will seek to interfere. This is why we must learn to watch the breath.

Following the breath and then labelling the experience of each breath as it rises and falls is central to open monitoring meditation (OM meditation). It is a primary practice and one you will turn to regularly.

When can I expect results?

The point of meditation is not to expect anything!

To make progress you need to practice regularly but don't expect or desire results. Try to cultivate 'effortless-effort', get out of the way and 'be' the practice rather than 'apply' it.

This way you find that the deeper teachings will unfold. Learn the techniques and practice but also be open to the subtleties and tone of new experience. Practice with an open heart and be receptive to everything. Know that meditation practice taps into your inner knowing (your intuition). Let the different aspects of knowledge, practice and technique sink in and it will become clear.

Meditation practice will help you open up and move beyond your intellectual understanding of experience. It will link you to a deeper, intuitive and more conscious awareness.

Will meditation change me?

Yes. With practice you will notice:

- That being present in the here and now reveals how the world really is and what you need to do in it.
- An emerging and empowering sense, in tune with your inner nature and being.
- How to properly relax, let go and reduce stress, anxiety and fear and to simply be still.
- How to trust intuition and direct your natural, spontaneous creativity and flow.
- That you can be an effective and inspiring leader and help empower others.
- Deepen your day-to-day experience and manifest your personal goals.

- Live skillfully and learn how to respond fruitfully to your thoughts, events and other people.
- Switch on your self-awareness, focus and concentration.
- Know how to incorporate meditation into everyday life and know the joy of doing.

What are the key principles?

Meditation is a simple process of directing and maintaining your attention to the present.

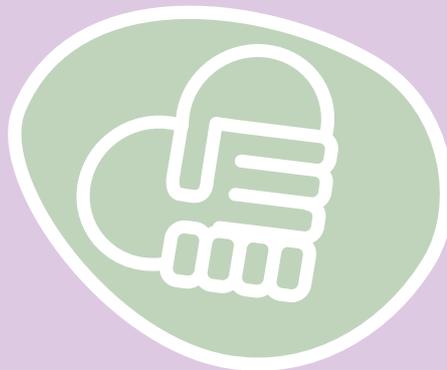
You learn to watch your thoughts, feelings and experiences objectively, in an open non-judgemental way without analysis or attachment. This leads to a heightened experience that helps you to live in the moment. This way, life doesn't pass you by unrecognised; you see things as they really are, not what you think they are.

These experiences enable you to live and work effortlessly, creatively and joyfully.

Things you need to know:

1. The word meditation simply means 'to attend'. All you do is turn up, pay attention to where you are and what you are doing without wanting to change things. This takes regular practice.
2. Meditation is not about forcing anything to happen. All the good stuff happens when you master the art of not trying.
3. It's not about stopping or suppressing your thoughts; it's about having a different relationship to them.
4. You don't need to recite a mantra, sit in an awkward posture or follow any doctrine.
5. It takes practice and commitment; meditation isn't a quick fix but it is a lasting one.
6. Anyone can meditate, anywhere at any time. That's the whole point. It's starts in the real world with you.
7. Meditation practice will reduce stress, anxiety and fear. It works directly on the brain and nervous system.
8. You don't need to adopt a different lifestyle. But you will notice benefits and positive changes in your everyday.

3. Overcoming Challenges



What if I can't feel my body?

Don't worry, you will.

Many people are not particularly body aware because most the time they are locked solely into their heads. Meditation practice helps to unlock that habit so that reconnection with the whole body is possible, promoting an experience of being, moment by moment.

To build your body awareness you will need to practice body scanning. This is a yoga technique (used for relaxation and yoga nidra). As you sit bring your attention to your fingers and then your toes. Don't look at them or move them. Just bring your attention there. After a short while you will become aware of a subtle and gentle sensation in the fingers and toes as your nervous system is stimulated and energy starts to flow. Your extremities are very sensitive to your attention.

Focus on the sensation without judging or forcing it. Just let it be as it is. Then after a while work towards growing and extending the sensation upwards through the arms and legs until you can sense the whole body as it is in the chair. Don't worry if there are areas that do not respond. That is common; just go where your body and mind allow you to go. Allowing the sensation to flow is how you direct and expand your attention and developing your own body consciousness.

What do I do with particular thoughts?

Nothing.

Following or examining a particular train of thought in meditation is not useful and will only distract you. The objective of your practice is to create a 'space' between you and your thoughts and any particular reaction prompted by the thought.

Certain patterns of negative thinking and how it impacts how you feel will be apparent as you practice. You do not need to cross examine your thinking in an effort to limit it. You will notice as you practice that you are preparing the ground and planting the seeds for good positivity to naturally grow.

Keep faith with the practice of simply 'watching' your thoughts as objects as they come and go. Once you manage to simply observe your thoughts without judgement or analysis they will settle. Your thoughts do not go away but as your relationship with them changes you will notice that they will fall into the background while in the foreground a deeper sense of stillness emerges.

My mind is always busy. What if I can't control it?

That is the point of meditation.

Your mind is busy. It's thinking most of the time, but if we try to control it, it will only get worse. Meditation is not mind control. We are not trying to switch the mind off, but switch it on!

Meditation is a change of perspective. A shift in how you observe and react to your mental activity. When we learn through practice, to sit alongside or underneath our flow of thoughts and simply 'witness' them as they come and go you will notice the mind will settle naturally without effort or force. It takes practice but you will feel this shift happen all by itself.

Trying to stop thinking is impossible, it's like trying to stop breathing; it can't be done. So instead what we do is accept what is going on in our head and then use meditation techniques to change our relationship to our thinking. Remember you are not your thoughts. Once we realise the implications of this we can change and shift our perspective.

What if my mind is always wandering?

That's fine, that's what it does.

The point of meditation is that we notice when the mind has wandered away from where we want it to be. Many people don't notice where the mind is going or has gone to. They just follow, allowing their mind to create assumptions, beliefs and frameworks, as it constantly gets caught up with distractions. A great moment in one's meditation journey is to realise that the mind has become distracted. With practice you bring it back, that is what is meant by mindfulness.

What if I can't sit still for so long?

You can; you will surprise yourself.

It's important not to force yourself to be still. That's why you should start with sitting for short periods. As you learn to relax, focus inwards and develop a body awareness you will notice that the body will remain still for longer periods.

Fidgeting is a sign of excess energy and an agitated mind. Meditation practice will eventually balance energy flow and settle the mind, naturally stopping fidgeting.

What if I fall asleep?

That's okay.

Many people will fall asleep in meditation, particularly in the evening. Your sitting posture will help you to stay awake. A useful technique is to meditate with the upper eyelids gently lifted, allowing a little light in. You won't be able to see anything clearly, other than your body as you sit in the chair. This technique also helps you focus forwards into the space between your eyebrows.

If sleep becomes a problem just gently bring your practice to an end, wait a few moments, get up and carry on with your day.

What if I get emotional?

That can happen.

Some people report feelings of either positive or negative emotion arising during or after meditation practice. Don't worry, this is perfectly normal. As you begin to relax, let go and open your experience, many of the unconscious restrictions and resistance you have unwittingly nurtured over the years to deal with certain feelings begin to loosen.

No matter what comes up, understand that it is a positive.

Sometimes, you will find yourself getting tearful for no apparent reason. Again, this is a good thing. The process of yoga and meditation are often referred to as removers of obstacles, so any emotions and feelings that are experienced are simply the clearing away of deeply-rooted issues.

Some people also report the resurfacing of certain childhood memories. Again, this is normal as the body/mind remembers when you last experienced profound moments of happiness and joy, often when we were young.

How do I deal with pain and discomfort?

Mindfully.

The point is to be comfortable. Do not sit on the floor crossed-legged unless you are used to it. Using a chair will minimise discomfort. Remember to use all experience as a chance to meditate. If any pain or discomfort arises (and it will) convert it into a meditation object. Simply watch and witness the feeling without judgement or one's relationship to it. For example instead of thinking 'I am feeling pain', simply replace the knowing of it as 'sensation'. After a while the experience will fall away into the background.

Of course if it's too painful, change your posture.

A last piece of advice...

Get in the water and start swimming. Embrace your meditation teaching and delight in your practice. With this mindset, you will notice from day one how things can be different.

Good luck with your meditation journey. To learn more about **beanddo**, simply get in touch or experience one of our meditation programmes firsthand.



beanddo modern meditation designed to make happy work!