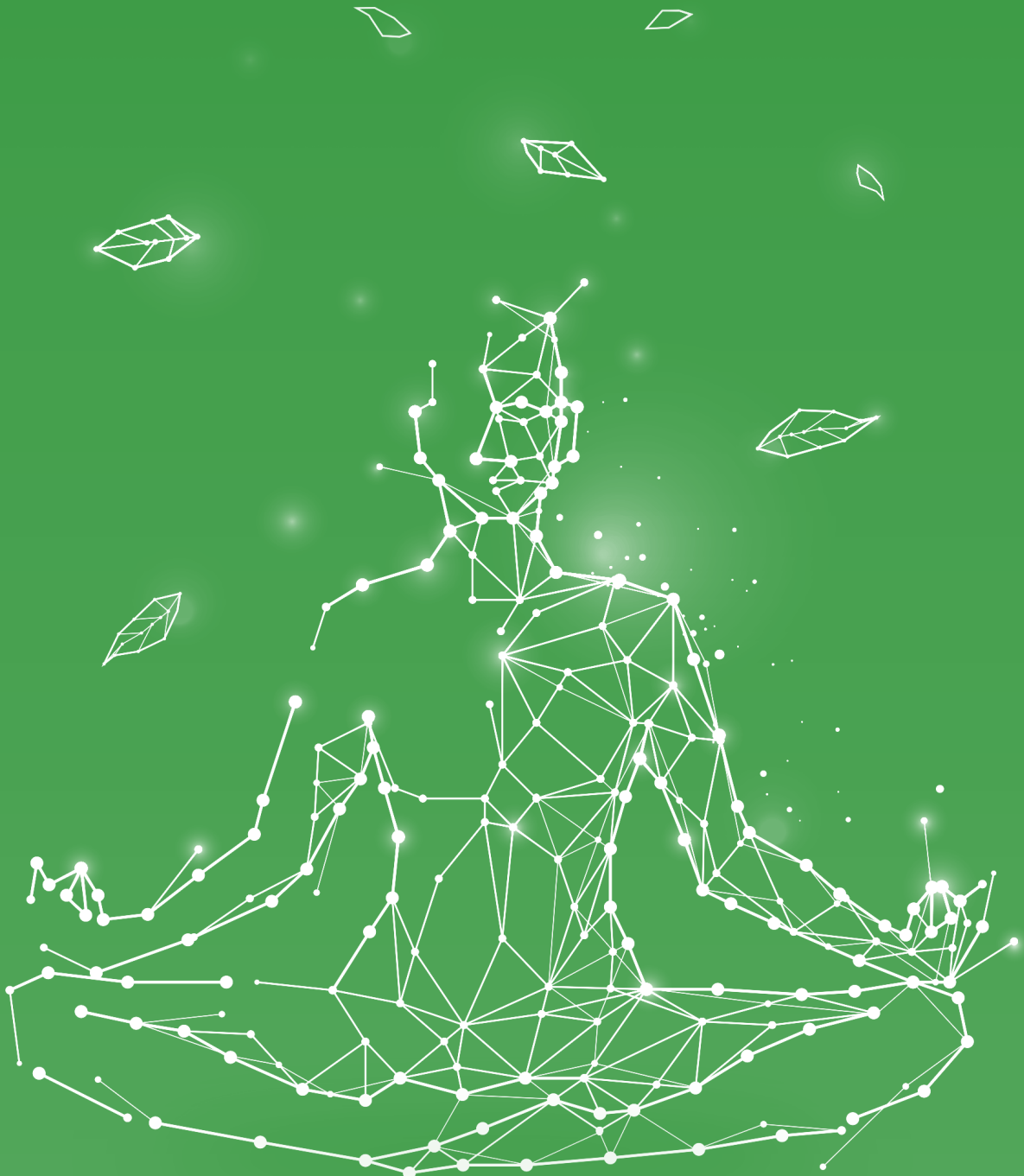




MINDFULNESS, MEDITATION & YOGA FOR YOUR FITNESS JOURNEY



WHAT IS MEDITATION AND MINDFULNESS?

A lot of people still think that meditation means sitting cross legged in a quite dark place but the popularity of meditation is increasing as more individuals discover its benefits. Meditation is a habitual process of training your mind to focus and redirect your thoughts.

You can use it to increase awareness of yourself and your surroundings. Many people think of it as a way to reduce stress and develop concentration. People also use the practice to develop other beneficial habits and feelings, such as a positive mood and outlook, self-discipline, healthy sleep patterns and even increased pain tolerance.

If you're on a fitness journey or just trying to improve Your overall health you should definitely consider giving meditation a try.

Mindfulness and meditation are techniques you can learn which involves making a special effort to notice what's happening in the present moment (in your mind, body and surroundings) – without judging anything. It has roots in Buddhism and meditation, but you don't have to be spiritual, or have any particular beliefs, to try it.

It aims to help you:

- Become more self-aware
- Feel calmer and less stressed
- Feel more able to choose how to respond to your thoughts and feeling
- Cope with difficult or unhelpful thoughts
- Be kinder towards yourself

Many people find practising mindfulness helps them manage their day-to-day well-being, but it doesn't always work for everyone.

Mindfulness is a skill. It requires work and practice like any skill. It isn't a shortcut and courses only set the scene. Many people find it enjoyable and rewarding. Most people find it brings some peace into my life.

How does mindfulness work?

The way we think (and what we think about) can affect how we feel and act. For example, if you think or worry a lot about upsetting past or future events, you might often feel sad or anxious.

The theory behind mindfulness is that by using various techniques to bring your attention to the present (usually focusing on your body and your breathing), you can:

- Notice how thoughts come and go in your mind. You may learn that they don't have to define who you are, or your experience of the world, and you can let go of them.
- Notice what your body is telling you. For example, tension or anxiety can often be felt in your body (such as in a fast heartbeat, tense muscles or shallow breathing).

MEDITATION TIP **HELPS REDUCE STRESS**

Stress reduction is one of the most common reasons people want to try meditation.

Mental and physical stress cause increased levels of the stress hormone cortisol. This produces many of the harmful effects of stress, such as the release of inflammation-promoting chemicals called cytokines.

These effects can disrupt sleep, promote depression and anxiety, increase blood pressure and contribute to fatigue and cloudy thinking.

Research has shown that meditation may also improve symptoms of stress-related conditions, including irritable bowel syndrome, post-traumatic stress disorder and fibromyalgia.

MEDITATION TIP HELPS CONTROL ANXIETY

Less stress translates to less anxiety. For example, an eight-week study of mindfulness meditation helped participants reduce their anxiety. It also reduced symptoms of anxiety disorders, such as phobias, social anxiety, paranoid thoughts, obsessive-compulsive behaviours and panic attacks.

Another study followed up with 18 volunteers three years after they had completed an eight-week meditation program. Most volunteers had continued practising regular meditation and maintained lower anxiety levels over the long term.

A larger study in 2,466 participants also showed that a variety of different meditation strategies may reduce anxiety levels.

For example, yoga has been shown to help people reduce anxiety.

This is likely due to benefits from both meditative practice and physical activity. Meditation may also help control job-related anxiety in high-pressure work environments.

MEDITATION TIP ***HELPS PROMOTE EMOTIONAL HEALTH***

Some forms of meditation can also lead to an improved self-image and more positive outlook on life.

Two studies of mindfulness meditation found decreased depression in over 4,600 adults.

One study followed 18 volunteers as they practised meditation over three years. The study found that participants experienced long-term decreases in depression.

Inflammatory chemicals called cytokines, which are released in response to stress, can affect mood, leading to depression.

A review of several studies suggests meditation may reduce depression by decreasing these inflammatory chemicals.

Another controlled study compared electrical activity between the brains of people who practised mindfulness meditation and the brains of others who did not.

Those who meditated showed measurable changes in activity in areas related to positive thinking and optimism.

MEDITATION TIP ***ENHANCE SELF-AWARENESS***

Some forms of meditation may help you develop a stronger understanding of yourself, helping you grow into your best self.

For example, self-inquiry meditation explicitly aims to help you develop a greater understanding of yourself and how you relate to those around you.

Other forms teach you to recognise thoughts that may be harmful or self-defeating. The idea is that as you gain greater awareness of your thought habits, you can steer them toward more constructive patterns. Experience in meditation may cultivate more creative problem solving.

MEDITATION TIP ***IT MAY HELP TO FIGHT ADDICTIONS***

The mental discipline you can develop through meditation may help you break dependencies by increasing your self-control and awareness of triggers for addictive behaviours.

Research has shown that meditation may help people learn to redirect their attention, increase their willpower, control their emotions and impulses and increase their understanding of the causes behind their addictive behaviours.

One study that taught 19 recovering alcoholics how to meditate found that participants who received the training got better at controlling their cravings and craving-related stress.

MEDITATION TIP **HELPS CONTROL PAIN**

Your perception of pain is connected to your state of mind, and it can be elevated in stressful conditions.

For example, one study used functional MRI techniques to observe brain activity as participants experienced a painful stimulus.

Some participants had gone through four days of mindfulness meditation training, while others had not. The meditating patients showed increased activity in the brain centres known to control pain. They also reported less sensitivity to pain.

One larger study looked at the effects of habitual meditation in 3,500 participants. It found that meditation was associated with decreased complaints of chronic or intermittent pain. In each of these scenarios, meditators and nonmeditators experienced the same causes of pain, but meditators showed a greater ability to cope with pain and even experienced a reduced sensation of pain.

Meditation can help control this, by learning to get a better connection between mind and body.

MEDITATION TIP **YOU CAN MEDITATE ANYWHERE**

People practice many different forms of meditation, most of which don't require specialised equipment or space.

You can practice with just 5-10 minutes daily. If you want to start meditating, try choosing a form of meditation based on what you want to get out of it.

To find out which styles you like best, check out the variety of free, guided meditation exercises offered on YouTube.

There are also numerous Apps that offer introduction to meditation for free.

Try using CALM, HEADSPACE or EnVision meditation Apps.

If your regular work and home environments do not allow for consistent, quiet alone time, consider participating in a class. This can also improve your chances of success by providing a supportive community.

Alternatively, consider setting your alarm a few minutes early to take advantage of quiet time in the morning. This may help you develop a consistent habit and allow you to start the day positively.

MEDITATION TIP

MINDFULNESS EXERCISES TO TRY?

Here are a few exercises you could try. You don't need any special equipment and can be easily added to your day to day life:

Mindful Eating: This involves paying attention to the taste, sight and textures of what you eat. For example, when drinking a cup of tea or coffee you could focus on how hot and liquid it feels on your tongue, how sweet it tastes or watch the steam that it gives off.

Mindful Moving, Walking or Running: Notice the feeling of your body moving. You might notice the breeze against your skin, the feeling of your feet or hands against different textures on the ground or nearby surfaces, and the different smells that are around you.

Body Scan: This is where you move your attention slowly through different parts of the body, starting from the top of your head moving all the way down to the end of your toes. You could focus on feelings of warmth, tension, tingling or relaxation of different parts of your body.

Mindful Colouring and Drawing: Focus on the colours and the sensation of your pencil against the paper, rather than trying to draw something in particular. You could use a mindfulness colouring book or download mindfulness colouring images.

Mindful Meditation: This involves sitting quietly and focusing on your breathing, your thoughts, sensations in your body and the things you can hear around you. Try to bring you focus back to the present if your mind starts to wander. Many people also find that yoga helps them to concentrate on their breathing and focus on the present moment.

MEDITATION TIP

5 EASY STEPS TO GET STARTED

Step 1: Prepare Your Space

First things first: select your spot. Find somewhere quiet and peaceful, where you won't be disturbed during your meditation. This might be your bedroom, home office, or anywhere that you can close the door and find uninterrupted solitude. As you practice meditation, it will become easier to practice anywhere, but as you are first getting started, quiet and solitude are very beneficial.

Once you've settled on a location, make sure that your meditation spot is neat and clean. A messy, cluttered space can make it harder to relax and focus. While not required, you might also find it helpful to set the mood by lighting a candle or stick of incense, or playing some soft, ambient music—whatever helps you get “in the zone.”

Step 2. Set a Goal

Starting a meditation practice can be challenging to people, especially in our fast-paced world. I find that it is extremely helpful to decide in advance how long you are going to practice, so that you have accountability from the beginning. I recommend 10-20 minutes per session, depending on how comfortable you are in your practice; adjust as needed.

It's important to note that distractions are inevitable, and that is okay. Do what you can to minimize them (turn off your phone, let your roommates / family know what you're up to, etc). If you are interrupted for whatever reason, just sit back down and finish your session as soon as you can.

The biggest hurdle by far, especially in the beginning, is not distractions, but your own mind and restlessness. The ego can't stand sitting quietly, doing nothing, and it will come up with an endless list of things you should or could be doing instead. Don't give in. Set a timer, or a stopwatch, or an alarm on your phone, and don't dismiss your meditation until your settled-upon time has been reached.

Step 3. Get Comfortable

When I say “get comfortable”, I am speaking in the literal sense. Posture is important in meditation, for many reasons. It helps you breathe easier and deeper. It helps the flow and circulation of blood and energy.

Perhaps most importantly, sitting properly will help to minimize aches, pains and discomfort.

There is not one correct way to sit; this depends on your body type, bone structure, and constitution. You can sit on the floor, on a cushion or a bench. You can sit in a chair, or even stand up if that’s easier. The important thing is not to slouch, or lean against anything. You should be relaxed yet poised, loose yet balanced, comfortable but alert.

Pay attention to any pain or discomfort in your back or your legs, and make adjustments as necessary. It takes time, but eventually you will find the “sweet spot,” where your spine is erect, but not rigid; straight, but not stiff.

The perfect balance of effort and ease.

Step 4. Follow the Breath

Bring your attention to your breathing. Focus on the sensations: the air flowing in and out of your mouth and nostrils; the rise and fall of your chest, the filling and emptying of your belly.

Don't try to control your breathing. No need to deliberately breathe slow or deep (although this will often happen on it's own, as you become aware of your breathing).

Just pay attention, and feel the rhythm, the ebb and flow.

Step 5. Just Relax.

Easier said than done, right? But relaxing is possible, and the first step is awareness. Start by becoming aware of any places in your body where there is tension or discomfort. We have a tendency to store stress in our bodies, particularly in the legs, shoulders, back, neck and face.

Each time you breathe out, imagine that tension flowing out of your body. With every breath, release and relax, until you feel entirely comfortable and at ease. This can take some time, especially as you are first getting started. Generally, the more often you practice, the quicker and easier it will be to let go of stress and sink into a state of peace and relaxation.

Let's Talk Yoga

Brief Overview

Mountain spend 3-5 minutes working on getting the posture right and getting control of your breathing.

Downward dog, you can flow between it and child's pose a few times. Work on getting into the pose a few times trying each time you lift into it, to get more stable and comfortable with a greater degree of mastery. Each time you're in down dog, spend 1-2 minutes working the pose.

Flowing into child's pose take your moment to enjoy breathing and stretching out that back don't rush this or any other pose.

Take anywhere from 1-5 minutes working the pose, its not a still pose, you're breathing and working on stretching your body so shift weight.

To move into cobra from child's pose, pull your torso forwards don't rush into the pose, but take the time to move through the floor to the pose. Once you're in cobra hold it for 1-2 minutes and work on breathing while shifting weight around getting comfortable in all ranges of the pose.

Finally getting into "Lotus Position" this should be seen as the finish line, spend 5-10 minutes sitting with your thoughts, decompressing and owning your time.

The main thing with yoga practice is to avoid any rush with any single pose or transition from one to another. It is your time with your thoughts and body, while you work to control and simultaneously letting go of control of your structure.

Yoga Pose For Beginners **MOUNTAIN (Tadasana)**

“The Mountain Pose” Will allow you become the master of your mind and body, a foundation to a better quality of movement. Getting this posture correct will be the base to further more challenging poses, like headstands & handstands.

Use this pose to perfect your standing posture paired with better breathing, its not physically demanding so take this chance to practice nasal breathing with your diaphragm.

Easy way to do that.. close your mouth, as you Inhale slowly push your belly button away from your spine & as you exhale pull your belly button back towards your spine.

1. Stand with your feet together & arms by your sides. Distribute you weight evenly across your feet as if you were grabbing the floor with your feet. Breathe slowly and with control, focus on the present moment let all worries and concerns fade away.

If you have trouble balancing, stand with your feet six inches apart.

2. Squeeze your outer shins toward each other. Pull the top of your thighs up and back, engaging the quadriceps. Rotate your thighs slightly inwards, widening your sit bones.
3. Tuck in your tail bone, but don't round your lower back. Lift the back of your thighs, but release your buttocks. Keep your hips even with the center line of your body.

Yoga Pose For Beginners ***MOUNTAIN (Tadasana)***

4. Lift your chest & drop your shoulders down and back (but don't pin your shoulders together keep them relaxed but postured.)
5. Turn your thumbs away from your body and keep your arms inline with the side of your body.
6. Keep control & be conscious of your breathing. Keep your eyes front and center with your neck relaxed.



Yoga Pose For Beginners

DOWNWARD DOG (Adho Mukha Svanasana)

Obviously this is one of the most recognized poses in yoga, Downward Dog is a standing pose with a mild inversion that builds strength while stretching the whole body.

It's named after the way dogs naturally stretch. Downward Dog (also sometimes called "Downward-facing Dog" or just "Down Dog") is an essential part of a sun salutation(essentially the warm up section of a yoga flow) and is often done many times during a yoga session.

It can be used as a resting pose between tougher movements, a strength building base posture or simply to stretch & mobilize before a gym session.

It stretches your ;

- Hamstrings
- Shoulders
- Calves
- Arches of your feet
- Spine

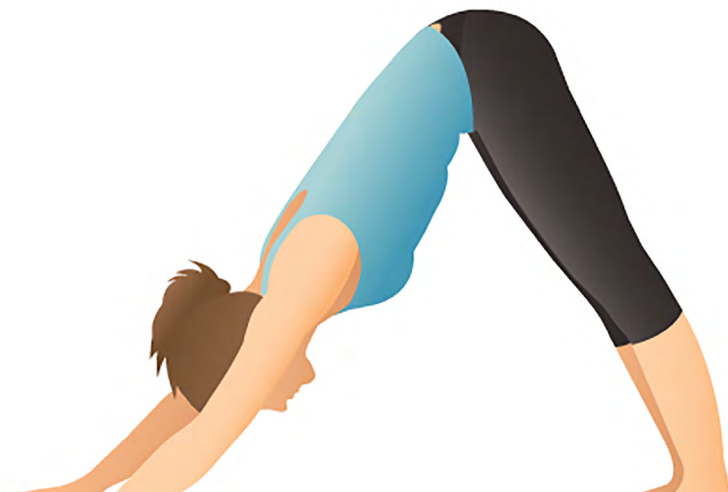
It will also building passive strength in your arms, shoulders, and legs. Because your heart is higher than your head in this pose it is considered a mild inversion (less strenuous than other inversions, such as Headstand) and holds all the benefits of inversions: Relief from headaches, insomnia, fatigue, and mild depression. The flow of blood to the brain also calms the nervous system, improves memory and concentration, and relieves stress.

Regular practice of this pose can improve digestion, relieve back pain, and help prevent osteoporosis. It is also known to be therapeutic for sinusitis, asthma, flat feet, and for the symptoms of menopause.

Yoga Pose For Beginners

DOWNWARD DOG (Adho Mukha Svanasana)

1. Begin on your hands and knees, with your wrists under your shoulders & knees under your hips
2. Spread your fingers wide and push your hands into the mat, to get a solid base for your upper body.
3. Drop your heels to the floor as you push your hips to the ceiling, straighten your legs, but don't lock your knees.
4. Let your head hang heavy, with your eyes reaching for the back of your heels.
5. Push to lock your arms out and have a straight line from your hands to your hips.
6. Lastly drawn your belly button towards your spine and enjoy the pose.



Yoga Pose For Beginners

CHILD'S POSE (Balasana)

Child's Pose is usually one of your first poses. It is often used as a resting position in between more demanding poses during a yoga practice, but its also hugely beneficial as a standalone pose to stretch the hips, thighs, and ankles while reducing stress and fatigue.

It gently relaxes the muscles on the front of the body while softly and passively stretching the muscles on the back of the torso.

1. Begin sitting on your heels with your toes pointing to the wall behind you, bring your attention inwards lift your heart over your hips, shoulders over heart & head over shoulders then close your eyes and consciously breath, before we move into the floor posture.
2. Spread your knees wide as you slide your hands along the mat lowering your chest and tummy to your thighs.
3. Get your hands as far away from your body as you can allowing your forehead to rest on the floor and feeling your spine lengthen.
4. If you are breathing deeply with your diaphragm, you should be feeling your breath lift and lower you on every breath cycle.
5. If you want to move this into more of a relaxation pose, send your hands back to rest alongside your feet with your palms facing up. Relax your arms, Let your upper back broaden. Relax your lower back and allow any tension fade away.

To release this pose gently walk with your hands step by step as you pull your spine together piece by piece



Yoga Pose For Beginners **COBRA (Bhujangasana)**

Cobra Pose is the beginner back bend in yoga that helps to prepare the body for more challenging back bends. Most of us don't move our spines enough.. So this pose can be life changing for back pain.

Cobra Pose is best known for its ability to increase the flexibility of the spine. It stretches the chest while strengthening the spine and shoulders. It also helps to open the lungs, which is therapeutic for asthma.

This pose also stimulates the abdominal organs, improving digestion.

1. Begin by lying on your belly on the floor with your legs extended behind you, spread a few inches apart. The tops of your feet should be face down do not tuck your toes.
2. Get your hands down under your shoulders fingers spread wide, elbows tucked as if you're holding the straps of a backpack.
3. Press down through the tops of your feet and your pubic bone, draw in a long slow breath.
4. Release that breath as your push through the floor and send your eyes to the sky.

Yoga Pose For Beginners ***COBRA (Bhujangasana)***

5. Pull your shoulder blades together and lengthen out your abdominals, lock your arms out because if your arms are bent..

You're going to feel a lot of tension on your triceps rather than relaxing into the pose.

6. To get out of this pose unlock your arms and slowly lower your chest back to the floor.



Yoga Pose For Beginners

LOTUS POSITION

Lotus Pose is arguably the most iconic manifestation of what meditation looks like. It also stretches the knees, ankles, and hips; and strengthens the spine and upper back. According to the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, The Lotus Pose is the “destroyer of all diseases.”

1. Sit on the floor with your legs in front of you, heart over hips, shoulders over heart and head over shoulders (aka straighten up your spine) rest your arms by your side.
2. Get your right foot flat on the floor so you can hug your knee to your chest. You can then lift your foot and place it in the crease of your left hip & as you drop your knee to the floor the sole of your foot faces the sky.
3. Now repeat on the left side step by step, your ankles are now crossed.
4. Draw your knees together and press your groin into the floor, straighten out that spine.
5. Lay the top of your hands down on your thighs and make a circle between your index fingers & thumbs, then close your eyes and breath.

Enjoy this pose as a quiet moment to yourself, but if the pose is too difficult for your current flexibility.. Focus on the posture in “step 1”





 [paul_wallace_fitness](https://www.instagram.com/paul_wallace_fitness)

 Designed and produced by [@Nutritional_bear](https://www.instagram.com/Nutritional_bear)