

# Stress Management Series

## Part 5

### Breath-Awareness Meditation

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This article is intentionally kept brief, clean and without metaphors or discussions on why we meditate. I am just giving you guidance on one validated method of practice.

Place: One can meditate anywhere. Having a designated room, or space in your home, for the practice of meditation assists tremendously, however it is not necessary. Meditating outside, although wonderful, adds many layers of distractions that can make it difficult for novice and experienced meditators alike. Pets love meditators; this is not pet cuddling time!

Time: I encourage practicing 30 minutes twice daily, at any time of day. Sunrise and sunset are beautiful meditation times. Meditation is also preferable before eating, as we are not trying to encourage sleep-time! Have a timepiece nearby for you to feel comfortable with the passage of time during meditation. I discourage alarms as they can pull one out of meditation too abruptly. We don't have the time to not meditate, so allow as much time as you can into your schedule even if it is only 15 minutes per day.

Easy In/Easy out: As time permits try to allow for some gentle yoga or stretching going into meditation. It allows the body and mind to settle. When finished take the time to gently allow your body and mind to acclimate to normal activity instead of rushing out of meditation.

#### The Practice:

- Sit comfortably with an upright posture, aligning the spine and energy centers
- Feet should be comfortably placed on the ground, or one can sit in the lotus or half-lotus position based on your preference
- Gently close your eyes
- Bring your attention to the breath, specifically to the in and out of the breath
- Just allow your attention to flow with the in and out of the breath
- When it is comfortable for you, introduce the "breath-awareness mantra" which is the simple, *internal* repetition of the sound "So" on the in breath and "Hum" on the out breath
- Continue to follow the in and out of the breath, silently repeating "So-Hum" on the in breath and out breath respectively

- The nature of meditative practice is such that your attention will be drawn to thoughts in your mind, feelings in your body, or sounds in the environment
- Whatever your attention has been drawn to, upon realization, gently bring your attention back to the in and out of the breath while silently repeating “So-Hum”
- Release any expectations you have for this process as you would any other thought
- Comfortably accept that the flow of the attention from breath to distraction is the meditative process
- When you feel that it is time to close your practice, glance at the timepiece nearby. If there is still time left, gently close the eyes and continue, or, if you have completed the allotted time, allow yourself a few moments to sit with your eyes closed and let the attention go back to the normal feelings and sensations (easy out), and when you are ready open the eyes again.
- Finish by slowly getting up and going about your daily practices

The Art of Meditation: This is the time you allow for your attention to go to silence/self. The experience is that of *timelessness*, you will notice that some meditations “fly” by and some seem interminable. We never base the time spent on meditation according to your perceptions of that meditation—meaning that if time flies we don’t go longer, and that if time creeps by, we don’t cut the meditation off more quickly. This takes us to *nonjudgmental*, meaning our meditation time is not the time to judge thoughts as good or bad: whatever thoughts or feelings come up, we simply bring our attention back to the breath. If you have a truly brilliant thought, it will be there after meditation! This is not the time we allocate to daydreaming, but the true neutral observation of all that occurs. Finally, *effortless*, as any effort put into meditation works against the process. When I hear people tell me that I “tried” to meditate but “just couldn’t”, I tell them that within their very verbiage I am told why they found it so difficult. Trying prevents meditation! Just hold a gentle agreement to bring the attention to the breath whenever we realize our attention is on any distraction. This is what makes the meditative process so unique; we know that meditation is occurring when the “three symptoms of meditation: timelessness, nonjudgmentality and effortless” flow through the process.

The Experiences of Meditation: Three experiences can occur during a meditation:

1. Lots of thoughts, feelings: Yes, this is part of meditation and often the reason people say they “just can’t meditate”. Saying I can’t meditate because “my mind won’t stop” or “I can’t sit still” is the equivalent of saying I can’t brush my teeth because I have crud coating all of my teeth! If one holds no judgment of the awareness “that I’m having too many random thoughts” and just continues to meditate, all the benefits of meditation will eventually occur. Actually, the realization that random thoughts are intruding into your life is a great one to come to.

2. Sleep: Everyone will occasionally fall asleep during meditation; it means you are tired. If, however, it is a common occurrence, it simply brings awareness to the fact that a lifestyle change is necessary, because if one can't sit still and close their eyes without falling asleep then a serious health disturbance is present. Sleep is a state of awareness known as *restful dullness* and is dramatically different physiologically from:
3. Restful Alertness: Silence...the experience of no thoughts or an awareness of the breath. Once we are aware of the silence, we are thinking, and it is time to bring the attention back to the breath, nothing more or less.

Although there are myriads of forms and types of meditation, “Breath-Awareness Meditation” has been practiced by millions of individuals over thousands of years. Enjoy, yet be aware that meditative practice, as any discipline, requires courage, conviction, and commitment!

Your Journey to Health and Healing,  
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