



## Types of Meditation

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### **Transcendental Meditation**

One of the most popular and well-known forms of meditation by far, is transcendental meditation - or TM. This type of meditation original comes from India during the 1950s and is practiced by many high-profile celebrities.

The general concept however is very simple and is actually one of the most tested. Simply, practitioners are tasked with completely emptying their minds of all thoughts and all distractions. They do this by focusing on something - which will very often be a mantra. A mantra is just a word or phrase that you repeat over and over, and this could be as simple as the word 'Om' (so *that's* where that comes from!). The mantra should have no meaning, because the aim is not to 'reflect' on meaning and thereby trap yourself at the 'surface level'.

The aim though is to focus just on this mantra, and then to allow all other distractions to sink away. If you notice yourself thinking about something else, just calmly bring your mind back to the point of focus and calm.

Transcendental meditation is a regulated form of meditation that is led by instructors. However, it is also very similar in aim and method to other forms such as Vedic meditation. We can use TM as a broad term to describe almost any form of meditation where the objective is to empty the mind by focusing on a singular quale (stimulus).

### **Body Scan/Progressive Relaxation**

Body scan meditation is often used in conjunction with mindfulness meditation and is what we can think of as a form of 'kinaesthetic meditation' (meaning that the focus is on the body and the way you feel).

The aim of this kind of meditation is to gradually move your focus across your body, while relaxing each muscle during the process. Throughout the day, we all carry a lot of tension in our muscles. Some of this is caused by stress, some by knots in the fascia that surround your muscle, and some by normal, healthy tension known as 'tonus' (this is what helps to keep a little tautness in the muscles and prevents our body from completely relaxing in a limp heap!).

When you use progressive relaxation, your aim is to release as much of this tension as possible - calming the mind as a by-product. So, you might start by focusing on your forehead. Is there any tension in your brow? How about your ears?

Contract each muscle, then make a conscious effort to release it - breathing out slowly as you do in order to ensure that the area is fully relaxed. This form of meditation not only distracts you from your troubles and helps you to get 'out of your own head', but it and this could be as simple as the word 'Om' (so *that's* where that comes from!). The mantra should have no meaning, because the aim is not to 'reflect' on meaning and thereby trap yourself at the 'surface level'. The aim though is to focus just on this mantra, and then to allow all other distractions to sink away. If you notice yourself thinking about something else, just calmly bring your mind back to the point of focus and calm.

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### **Loving Kindness Meditation**

Loving kindness meditation is a form of meditation that involves focusing your attention fully on feelings and thoughts of kindness and love. These can be directed towards others, but they can also be directed towards yourself. That means that you're going to be cultivating these feelings - enjoying the warm bask of kind feelings at times when you're feeling low or stressed, but ultimately reinforcing these habits so that you become *more likely* to fall back on those kinds of feelings, rather than sinking into negativity and doubt quickly.

### **Kundalini Yoga Meditation**

Kundalini yoga meditation is a form of mediation that incorporates specific movements, diet, and more. The aim is that you're going to be looking to improve your flexibility, muscle tone, and strength, while at the same time calming the mind and improving your breathing - getting a whole lot of bang for your buck.

Breathing is performed slightly differently in kundalini meditation. Here, you block the left nostril and use a long, deep inhalation. Next you block the right nostril and as you do this, you allow the mind to clear.

### **Nada Meditation**

Nada meditation is another yogic method that involves using an outside stimulus. This time though, you will be focusing on your other sense: hearing.

Nada meditation means focusing on one sound, which can mean listening to the sound of a babbling brook for instance, the wind, the traffic... You can alternatively open yourself up to all the sound many sounds as possible. It might surprise you to learn just how many sounds you miss out on normally - and how much you can hear when you broaden your scope.

Nada meditation can also be achieved using music, which many people find is an easy way to get themselves lost without thought.

### **Vedic Meditation**

Vedic meditation is extremely similar to transcendental meditation, but without the branding and marketing. Essentially, it involves focusing on a mantra to calm the mind and body. There is really little functional difference between these two forms of meditation, but seek out TM if you feel the need for an instructor and guidance.

### **Zazen Meditation**

Zazen Meditation is a form of Buddhist meditation. Like TM, it requires an instructor in order to get the real deal, but in practice it is extremely similar to mindfulness





meditation – which we will be exploring in much greater depth later. The aim though is essentially to try and detach from the thoughts and to allow them to go past ‘without judgement’. You are not emptying the mind, simply disengaging from it.

### **Chi Kung**

From Shaolin Kung Fu, Chi Kung is a form of meditation that really means ‘energy work’. Its objective is to help practitioners ds around you and take a moment to stop and listen to as visualize the flow of ‘chi’ (qi) around the body, in order to enhance health and strength. Of course, your belief in chi may vary – but whatever your interpretation, the visualisation can help you to better focus the mind and even develop a better connection to your own body.

Chi Kung involves holding a number of positions, which place a light amount of strain on the body. This further helps to route the mind in the body, as does gently moving occasionally from one to the other. You will practice controlled breathing, and at the same time bring the mind to the center – or the ‘dan tien’ – which is located a couple of centimetres below the navel and also happens to be the center of gravity.

### **Tai Chi**

Tai Chi is a form of meditation that has close links to Chi Kung. Here, the movement is far more continuous, with practitioners gently progressing through a series of stances and movements.

Again, the idea is to use this as a form of kinaesthetic meditation, wherein the focus on the body helps to clear the mind. At the same time though, this can also be a good way to develop a greater control over the body and greater strength. Each of these movements in fact has a martial application, and when delivered with speed and power can be deadly.

### **Third Eye Meditation**

Whereas chi kung focusses the attention on the dantien (just below the navel), this form of meditation involves focusing on the point in the middle of your forehead, just above and between the eyes.

### **Religious Meditation**

Christian meditation is a form of meditation that – of course – is practiced by Christians. It involves focusing on a passage from the bible or a prayer, and spending time really reflecting on its meaning and any attached emotion.

But this method can of course be used by practitioners of any faith, providing a useful way for them to combine their religion with the health benefits of meditation.

Of course, you could just as easily choose to focus on something else: how about thinking about the film you just saw? What about a poem that you respond to deeply?





### **Self-Enquiry Meditation**

For those who want their meditation to be a bit more spiritual but who perhaps don't want to adhere to any particular religion, self-enquiry is an ideal form of meditation. Here, you focus on yourself, your beliefs, and your goals.

Where do you see yourself heading in life? What is the meaning of your existence? Are you happy? This is another form of yogic meditation, and of course has a lot of potentially profound benefits.

### **Productive Meditation**

Productive meditation is distinctly *not* spiritual, and seems almost to be an anathema to the idea of meditation in a way - though this is not true as we will see in a moment.

You see, productive meditation - first suggested by Cal Newport in the book *Deep Work* - is a type of meditation where the focus is on a problem that you are having in your work or personal life. Or perhaps you're trying to think of something creative? Maybe you're trying to come up with a new idea?

### **Mindfulness Meditation**

Mindfulness meditation is the last item on this list, not because it is obscure - in fact it is perhaps the most popular option right now - but because we're about to dive into it in much more detail. This has recently become popular thanks to the prevalence of CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy) in psychotherapeutic schools, and involves detaching yourself from your thoughts. You do this by deciding to 'sit back' and 'watch' your thoughts go by. Often the analogy is given that you are 'watching clouds move across the sky'. So, you don't tell yourself off for thinking something, and nor do you force a thought. You just let them pass, and you make a conscious effort to be aware of them as they do.

