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Techniques for Practicing Mindfulness and Meditation

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Mindfulness, meditation, and other relaxation techniques can help you live your life more fully present in the moment, heighten your spiritual awareness, and well-being, and simply help you feel more relaxed and positive. Mindfulness is one of the easiest techniques to try out, as it's more of a mindset that you can practice anytime and anywhere. Practicing "mindfulness" means you're actively paying attention to the moment you're in right now. Rather than letting your mind wander, when you're mindful, you're living in the moment and letting distracting thoughts pass through your mind without getting caught up in their emotional implications. You can add mindfulness to virtually any aspect of your day – even while you're eating, working, or doing household chores like washing dishes – simply by paying attention to the sensations you are experiencing in the present moment.

1. Set Aside 25 Minutes: Choose a quiet place where you can sit comfortably, undisturbed, for at least 25 minutes.

2. Meditation Is a Natural State: Remember that you needn't control your mind or your breathing or worry about the details. Meditation is your natural state.

3. Guide Your Awareness to Your Physical Body: As you learn to quiet your mind, direct your awareness to the physical sensations in various layers of your body. As noted by Dupont in Epoch Times: *"Let awareness be free rather than forcing it to any particular place. Are there any sensations particularly prevalent in your inner body? Let awareness settle with an attitude of openness, curiosity, and a willingness to allow it to be as it is. When thoughts come up, allow them to be as they are and guide awareness back to the body. Notice how sensations change and how awareness will naturally be drawn elsewhere according to an innate guidance. Let awareness follow this... trust the body's wisdom as it guides you. Awareness will dissolve the energy patterns in the body and the mind will begin to become less dominant."*

4. Notice What Is Noticing: While you're meditating, you are noticing thoughts, sensations, and sounds. The next step is to take note of the presence that is noticing. *"This presence is not somewhere in your body, nor can it be defined in any way. It is spacious, free, unchanging, and unaffected by details. Sort of like the vast infinite sky that surrounds and encompasses everything,"* Dupont says in the Epoch Times.

5. Abide in the Presence: *"Rest as awareness."* When you find yourself getting hung up on thoughts, sensations, or emotions, allow them to simply be. Don't judge them or entertain their notions, simply release your awareness from them and experience more presence.

6. Repeat Steps 4 and 5: *"Contract on an object... allow it to be as it is... rest as awareness... contract on an object... allow it to be as it is... rest as awareness."*

7. Catch Awareness Faster: The more you set aside time to meditate, the easier it will be to catch awareness and fall into deeper presence for longer periods of time.

8. Ask Yourself If You're Trying to Control Your Experience: If you find yourself trying to avoid particular thoughts, sensations, or emotions, go back to letting those thoughts be.

9. 25 Minutes Is Ideal: Resist the urge to skimp on your meditative time. It may take you 15 or 20 minutes just to "unhook from the persistent draw" of your mind. If you don't give yourself enough time, you may miss out on the ultimate feeling of presence.

Learning Relaxation Techniques May Slash Your Need for Medical Services Nearly in Half

Stress-related problems, including back pain, insomnia, acid reflux, and exacerbations to irritable bowel syndrome may account for up to 70 percent of the average US physician's caseload.⁶ Such health-care expenditures are the third highest in the US, after only heart disease and cancer. New research suggests, however, that such costs could be cut drastically simply by becoming more relaxed. Researchers analyzed data from more than 4,400 people who received eight weeks of relaxation response training. For about three hours a week, participants focused on relaxation using techniques like meditation, yoga, and stress-reduction exercises. They also worked on building resiliency using social support, cognitive skills training, and positive psychology. After the program, the participants' use of medical services dropped by 43 percent compared to their usage the previous year.⁷ The researchers estimated such a change could save the average patient between \$640 and \$25,500 a year. Specifically, the relaxation patients reduced their clinical visits by 42 percent, their lab use by 44 percent, and their use of procedures by 21 percent. Visits to the emergency room were also reduced, from 3.7 times per patient in the previous year to 1.7 a year after the program. Study author Dr. James Stahl, director of the Institute for Technology Assessment at Massachusetts General, told Reuters:⁸ *"Meditation and yoga reduce stress, which in turn promotes wellness, which in turn reduces seeking and using healthcare resources."*

What Are the Health Benefits of Mindfulness and Meditation?

At its most basic level, meditation helps you take a deliberate break from the stream of thoughts that are constantly flowing in and out of your mind. Some people use it to promote spiritual growth or find inner peace, while others use it as a powerful relaxation and stress-reduction tool. There are physical benefits to meditating, too, with research showing it may lower blood pressure with just three months of practice, while at the same time decreasing psychological distress and increasing coping ability among young adults. Research from the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) also supports the notion that meditation acts as a form of "mental exercise" that can help regulate your attention and emotions while improving well-being. It's been found previously that meditation prompts changes in the amygdala, a region of your brain associated with processing emotion. The research suggests these beneficial brain changes persist even *after* the meditation session is over, resulting in enduring changes in mental function. As for mindfulness, research has shown mindfulness training leads to a number of benefits among children and adolescents, including:

- Improvements in attention and social skills
- Decreased test anxiety
- Drops in aggressive behavior among adolescents with a series of antisocial behaviors known as conduct disorder
- Improved classroom behavior, such as paying attention, self-control, participation in activities, and caring and respect for others