

Meditation Guidelines and Why it is Essential for Thriving and Awakening

Doug J. Moore, Ph.D. - Clinical Psychologist, Life Coach, & Spiritual Teacher www.DougJMoore.com | www.ThriveandAwaken.com



Why It's Important

Meditation is an essential Thriving Tool if we want to get out of Survival Mode. We are genetically, biological, and chemically predisposed to quickly enter a fight/flight/freeze reaction with the slightest hint of danger. This Survival Mode is there to protect us by minimizing our rational thinking and immediately activating our body to fight a predator, run from it, or drop down and hide, or pretend to be dead. You experience this all the time when someone cuts you off while driving, your alarm didn't go off, a friend was mean to you, or a loved one does not return an email or text within a couple of hours.

Fortunately, most of us no longer suffer from daily life-threatening events like our ancestors. However, our bodies still have some degree of the fight/flight/freeze reactivity with daily stressors. Over time the stress hormones and related physical reactions create inflammation and put us at risk for autoimmune conditions, cancer, and cardiovascular disease. Along with chronic diseases comes the impact of the coping strategies generally used to combat stress such as overdrinking, working excessively, and eating junk food.

The American Psychological Association states that chronic stress is linked to the six leading causes of death in the U.S. That includes heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis, and suicide. In addition, more than 75% of physician office visits are for stress related complaints.



Research

The research is crystal clear, meditation over time calms the fight/flight/freeze reactivity allowing us to make more conscious choices that support our Thriving Mode. Within three weeks of daily practice, we see greater neuronal connections in the prefrontal cortex, that part of the brain responsible for rational thinking located behind our forehead. Right away the amygdala, which regulates our fight/flight/freeze reactivity, becomes less sensitized, making it still responsive to life threatening situations but less likely to react to our daily stressors. After just two weeks of practice, we focus better and have improved working memory. With 30 hours of practice the research demonstrates that inflammation markers lessen. For a more complete review of the research check out the book, [Altered Traits](#) (Goleman & Davidson, 2017).



Role in Thriving

There are numerous forms of meditation that have at their core a regulation and calm focus of the mind. In Survival Mode the mind can be vigilant, hyperfocused on a threat while ignoring extraneous information. For example, if you are at a campfire with a bear approaching, all your attention is on the bear while totally ignoring

Meditation Guidelines

the beautiful moon and hooting owl. This happens during everyday stress as well. Consequently, you will have a limited recall of all the details in a heated conversation with your spouse—one of the biggest arguments a couple has is some variation of “You said...No I didn’t.” Thriving Mode is activated with meditation because it fosters open-mindedness. Also, with a regular practice we are more likely to remember events and are more comfortable acknowledging we may not remember something accurately.

While in Survival Mode, the mind can also be quite scattered rather than focused. Think about that bear back at the campfire. Imagine you just hear the growl somewhere in the forest and have no idea where that bear may appear. You are going to scan the entire area and quickly move your attention to every scampering squirrel and bird rustling leaves. With meditation we become more aware of how our mind is all over the place, sometimes referred to as “monkey mind”.

Meditation is essential to developing Thriving. It transforms our minds from a meandering reactive state to a more focused and peaceful way of being. This calm awareness allows us to choose rather than react, the quintessential difference between Thriving and Surviving. Over time we enhance our ability to be fully present for our feelings, thoughts, and sensations in an accepting and present manner. With the practice of meditation, we learn to be non-judgmental with whatever may arise within us. This provides our own compassionate healing environment that will help dissolve old wounds and reveal the loving radiant heart that is at the center of us all.



Role in Awakening

Meditation is also essential in Awakening to a greater consciousness. In Survival Mode we focus on doing and achieving the next item on our To Do list. We are still in significant reactivity when life doesn’t go the way we want it to. In Thriving Mode, we use the tools to be more mindfully present, allowing for more reasoned choices. In Awakening Mode, we still have reactivity, but it’s less intense and doesn’t persist as long. Less reactivity occurs because meditation shifts from just being a tool that we practice once or twice a day to becoming a way of being. We start to extend a calm awareness into everyday life while we do the dishes or have a conversation. Meditation in Awakening Mode orients life around Being while we Do. In Being more fully present in the now, it helps us deepen our presence which includes being grounded and present with our body, clear-minded, and open-hearted. This allows us to experience qualities of Awakening such as a sense of Oneness, Awe, Love, and Awareness.

Setup Guidelines

1. Determine how long you will meditate and set a gentle timer to inform you when the time is up. For beginners it is recommended starting with 5-10 minutes per day until you create a regular habit. Gradually increase the time to 20 minutes, twice a day.
2. You can do anytime during the day. Some like to do it in the morning to help set the stage for the day. Others prefer the evening as a way of winding down from the day. Doing it too late at night may result in more frequent episodes of falling asleep during the meditation.
3. The research shows a daily practice is most effective. If you can’t sit for 20 minutes, sitting for 5 is better than skipping the day.

Meditation Guidelines

4. Stretching or practicing Yoga, Tai Chi, or the Eden Daily Energy Routine first can heighten the impact of your meditation.
5. Find a chair that allows you to have a straight back; so you can sit with ease and allow the blood, nerves, and energy to freely flow. If your chair is too comfortable, you may fall asleep.
6. Have your feet flat on the floor, unless you are comfortable in a cross-legged position in your chair or on the floor.
7. Your meditation area should be one where you are not going to be disturbed by a phone, children, pets, etc. Have an arrangement with others you live with to not disturb you during this time. If noise is particularly distracting, turn on a fan facing away from you to provide some calming white noise. Gentle, very slow music is another option.
8. Remind yourself that however the meditation goes is perfect. You are showing up to be a compassionate witness as you focus your mind.

Practice Guidelines

1. Start with a couple very slow deep breaths noticing all the muscles relaxing with each exhale.
2. Do a slow scan of your entire body starting at the feet. You are bringing attention to each part of your body releasing any tension you may experience and sensing that region as part of the whole. This can be from 1-5 minutes.
3. Begin to focus on experiencing the breath coming in and out. Focus all of your attention on your belly expanding and falling with each breath. Do not try and change your breathing, you are just keenly aware of it.
4. Some people find it helpful to add a phrase with each inhalation and exhalation. For example, you may think, "So" on the inhale and "Calm" on the exhale. Other common phrases are "One", "Here Now", or from the Eastern traditions, "Om". Pick a phrase that is short, calming, and meaningful to you. Other people find it helpful to count each breath and then start over once they've reached 10 or have lost count. It is usually helpful to stick with one phrase once you've found one you resonate with most.
5. Your mind will wander—this is normal. When you notice it wandering, gently return to watching the breath and repeating your phrase. The biggest challenge people have with meditation is expecting themselves to focus better than whatever they are doing. One of the benefits of meditation is letting go of this expectation and compassionately supporting yourself wherever you might be.

The thoughts and feelings may be very compelling but keep returning to your focal point. There are other forms of meditation that pay attention to what is arising or even activating certain experiences such as gratitude. These are more advanced methods once you've established a regular meditation practice.

6. If you find yourself starting to fall asleep, you can take several rapid deep breaths and/or stand behind your chair holding on to the back of it for a few minutes. You may also switch to a walking meditation where you very slowly walk while experiencing your breath and the movement of your body.

Meditation Guidelines

7. Once your timer rings, very slowly come out of the meditation noticing various sounds and sights around you. After a minute of slowly acclimating to your senses, you can stand. If your legs were crossed, make sure your feet are not asleep before standing.
8. It is helpful to complete your meditation with the energy exercise, Connecting Heaven & Earth. This helps to activate your radiant circuits and provides a gentle stretch of the body.
9. Remember that meditation is a practice of being fully in the moment. Try to take that experience with you through the day. As you are sitting or standing in various places, practice watching your breath for 10-15 seconds and silently repeating your favorite phrase. As you practice this form of meditation called mindfulness, you'll experience the depths of the meditation practice as a way of being while you are engaged in life.



References

[*Altered Traits*](#) (Goleman & Davidson, 2017) is a great overview of the research showing how meditation changes your mind, brain, and body

[*Aware: The Science and Practice of Presence*](#) (Siegel, 2018) outlines the Wheel of Awareness and how to use in sharpening one's awareness.

[*Becoming Supernatural: How Common People are Doing the Uncommon*](#) (Dispenza, 2019) explores how meditation gives us the choice how to live life rather than letting our history repeat itself.

[*Bliss Brain*](#) (Church, 2020) discusses how meditation impacts your brain for resilience, creativity, and joy.

[*Integral Meditation: Mindfulness as a Way to Grow up, Wake up, and Show up in Your Life*](#) (Wilber, 2016) has practical teachings with the different stages of human development.

[*Meditation for Beginners*](#) (Kornfield, 2008) explains the Buddhist way to experience deep spirituality.

[*Relaxation Response*](#) (Benson, 2009) originally written in 1975 by a Harvard Medical School Professor who was a pioneer in illustrating the impact of meditation on us.

[*The Best Guide to Meditation*](#) (Davich, 1998) provides a nice overview of many forms of meditation.

[*The Meditative Mind*](#) (Goleman, 1988) discusses the varieties of meditative experiences.

[*Total Meditation: Practices in Living the Awakened Life*](#) (Chopra, 2020) guides readers on how to wake up to new levels of awareness that cultivate a clear vision, heal the mind/body, and recover who you really are.

[*True Meditation: Discover the Freedom of Pure Awareness*](#) (Adyashanti, 2006) highlights the importance of letting go of all techniques as the beginning of true meditation.

[*Wherever You Go There You Are*](#) (Kabat-Zinn, 2005) is a book to experience the application of meditation into everyday life.