

Meditation Posture in 7 Tips

This document presents 7 meditation tips that are the traditional instructions on the meditation posture.

1 - Finding your seat

It has long been recommended that the place where you will practice should be clean and relatively quiet place in which to sit down. You do not have to create a spotless environment in which to practice, but some straightening up of your meditation room can be helpful. If you do not have much space to work with, a good solution is simply to face a blank wall. Also, you do not need to shut out all sounds and so on coming from the world outside, but it is good to turn off sound from devices such as telephones and TV's etc. You will soon find that random noises from open windows and so on can actually be useful in your awareness practice.

The key point

- is to choose a time and place in which you will not be interrupted.

2- The cushion

You will feel most stable if you sit on a firm cushion such as a folded area rug with a pillow forming the top layer, or even a rolled-up sleeping bag. There are many good cotton meditation cushions available by mail order. Make your first cushion something that keeps your hips about 6 to 8 inches above the floor (for most people, higher if your body needs more time to stretch). Begin by simply cross your legs at the ankles and adjust your back and shoulders so that you feel uplifted and regal, but not ridged. You might feel more vertical and stable if you lean forward slightly. Your back muscles are very capable of holding you up for long periods (and they will slowly strengthen over time), so you can relax your legs, arms, abdomen and chest.

The key point

- is to begin to feel what is required to stay upright and yet relaxed in this way.

3 - Your back

The only muscles that you need to hold you up are your back muscles which need to work continuously, but not very hard. Feeling that your back is straight is the most important point in the instructions for the meditation posture. To achieve this, stretch the top of your head up to the sky, as if you were being pulled up by a string attached to the top of your head. This is a very useful visualization to use from time to time to adjust your posture as your body relaxes into the posture, but it is not meant to be visualized constantly. Bend your chin down a slightly towards your chest and straighten and elongate your spine so that it feels straight (even though of course, the natural curves of the spine remain.) Note that the hands are simply placed palm down on the thighs.

The key point

- All of this may seem unnatural at first, but later will become very comfortable and ordinary.

4 - The eyes

Generally, this meditation is performed with the eyes open and cast somewhat down in front of you, so that your gaze would fall on the floor about 4 to 6 feet in front of you (farther if you are sitting on a chair). Without focusing your eyes on anything, just let them fall in that direction. A helpful tip is to begin by closing your eyes for a few seconds, and then gently opening them, allowing them to remain wherever they naturally focus. This means that they will probably be focused somewhere other than, for example, the actual floor. That is, they may 'focus' at some point in the space between your body and the floor or maybe beyond the floor) so that you see two images—one from each eye. This is fine and will not cause any health problems.

The key point

- is to not have any tension in the eyes.

5 - Breathing: at the start

Take two or three deep breaths and then continue to breathe naturally. Later we will place more attention on the breath, but for now, simply feel how your body moves as you breathe: how your upper body expands and falls as you breathe in and out; the sound and feeling of the air as it moves in and out of your mouth and nose.

The key point

- Just let yourself become aware of this process for a few minutes and then settle into your posture.

6 - Completing the posture

We begin by taking a dignified and upright posture. The most stable posture for the body is to sit cross-legged on a firm but comfortable cushion on the floor. If that is not possible for you, then sitting on a chair is perfectly acceptable, but the main point is to keep your back straight. The muscles in the legs will take time to stretch and become comfortable when sitting cross-legged, so in the beginning it has always been highly recommended to sit for short sessions: maybe 5 to 10 minutes per session at first, or until your body feels uncomfortable, whichever comes first. In addition, it can be helpful to sit on a high cushion and gradually, over a long time, reduce its thickness.

Please remember that this practice cannot be quickly mastered, and to try to advance quickly with long sessions almost always leads to frustration with the technique. Many new meditators give up because they take an approach of attempting to quickly gain a result that they have decided they *should* gain, which is not really going to work.

The key point

- Keep your meditation session short.

7 - Practice body and breath awareness

I highly recommend that you stop reading here for now and make this body and breath awareness all that you will practice for a day or two, until you begin to feel at least a little bit stable in the posture described here. Just sit in this way for only a few minutes—not more than

10. There are very important reasons for keeping these sessions short that will be explained later.

Simply feel a sense of celebration that you have in fact made a great accomplishment today. This is the beginning of a new world for you in which the old ways of dealing with stress, anxiety and so on can be dealt with in a more practical way: by bringing awareness to them. Just the act of sitting down in this way can have an amazing effect on the body and mind, so you could enjoy it within an atmosphere of celebration and joy.

The key point

- Practice only body and breath awareness for a couple of days before learning more.

Bonus tip: Stretching

This is an optional step and one that is not included in the traditional instructions. Before or after you sit down on your meditation cushion, it can be helpful to stretch many of the muscles of the body and to combine this stretching with some deep breathing. I never did this much until I taught meditation to inmates in a Colorado jail. It was suggested to me by a former inmate (who started the program) that generally, prison inmates like to do this, so I gave it a try. Now, every time that I sit down to practice, I do stretch and/or do some deep breathing. I have found it to be a very helpful change of pace at the beginning of a meditation session.

More information can be found at www.meditationtips.org