

## MEDITATION FOR BEGINNERS

A daily meditation practice is probably the best difference you can make to your mental and physical health alongside eating well and regular exercise. Here are just a few scientifically accepted benefits of meditation: Increases immune function, emotional intelligence, social connection, memory, attention, focus and creativity and decreases depression, anxiety, inflammatory illness, addictive behaviours, stress, loneliness and pain.

To begin meditating – find a comfortable sitting position. The only prerequisite is that you have a straight back to enable a full breath on each inhalation. Close your eyes and as you breathe through your nose, scan your inner self – moving your focus from your head down through your body; what thoughts, emotions and physical sensations do you notice? There might be noisy thoughts clamouring in your head, a stiff neck or an itch that wants scratching. Agree with yourself that you'll sit still for a few minutes; that you won't scratch that itch or fidget just for a short while ...

Accept all the busyness and movement of your inner self and then gently switch your attention onto your breathing. Just notice your in-breath and out-breath. Try to inhale for four counts and exhale for four counts. Can you deepen your exhalation to five or six counts? It might be helpful to say to yourself (just in your mind, not out loud) “breathe in” on each inhalation and “breathe out” on each exhalation. Continue for a few minutes. Just notice if you become distracted by thoughts that are demanding attention: don't criticise or judge yourself for getting distracted. It's your mind doing exactly what it's supposed to do. Just notice that you got side-tracked and gently bring your full attention back to your breath again. “Breathing in ... breathing out ...” Continue this process for another ten minutes. Notice each distraction and always bring your focus back to your breathing again.

That's it – you're meditating! You don't need fancy recordings or a perfectly quiet environment. You can do this sitting up or lying down. The more you practice meditation, the easier it will become. Acceptance of where you're at, is all you need to improve. If you expect to find meditation easy or if you expect to empty your mind of all thoughts, you'll be setting yourself up to fail. ACCEPT exactly where you're at in your practice, whether it's a 5 minute, 10 minute or 40 minute daily practice. Remember – Rome wasn't built in a day. They say, it takes 21 days to develop a new behavioural habit; for the new neural pathways

to build and take hold. Continue for longer and you will build a solid practice which can help support you in every single physical, mental and emotional challenge ahead of you!

*In meditation practice, the best way to get somewhere is to let go of trying to get anywhere at all.” (Jon Kabat-Zinn: Wherever You Go, There You Are”*