



American Heart Association®

Healthy for Good™

YW6

YOUR WELL-BEING

Meditation to Boost Your Well-being

Time: 70 Minutes

Along with healthy eating and regular physical activity, practicing meditation or mindfulness may help you manage stress and high blood pressure. It also may help you sleep better, feel more balanced and connected and possibly lower your risk of heart disease.

OBJECTIVES:

List three health benefits of meditation.

Describe two types of meditation.

Experience a simple breath awareness meditation and a short walking meditation.

SETUP

- Review the resource list and print it out.
- Set up demo station with the necessary activity resources.
- Provide computer, internet access and projector, if available.
- Set up the room to allow for a circular walking path around the outer edges for part 2 of the activity.

INTRO (10 Minutes)

- Welcome participants and introduce yourself.
- Take care of any housekeeping items (closest bathroom, water fountain, etc.).
- Give a brief description of the educational experience.
- Ask the participants if they've had any experience with meditation. What did they like or not like? **(Give everyone a chance to speak.)**

LESSON (10 Minutes)

- Play video and present content (see demo script).

ACTIVITY (30 Minutes)

- Lead participants through two short meditations and facilitate discussion as they share their experiences.

RECAP (10 Minutes)

- Pass out handout(s) and review them with participants.

GOAL SETTING/CLOSING (10 Minutes)

- Engage in a goal-setting activity from the options provided in the Welcome Toolkit provided as part of the instructional materials. Pass out the Setting SMART Goals handout to participants.
- Thank participants and encourage them to join the next activity. (Provide date/time/location if known.)



Meditation to Boost Your Well-being Resource List

HANDOUTS/VIDEOS

Find these resources on AHA's YouTube channel
or heart.org/healthyforgood

- ❑ Video – [Meditation to Boost Your Well-being](#)
- ❑ Article – [Meditation to Boost Health and Well-being](#)
- ❑ Article – [Exercise Mind and Body with Yoga and Mindful Movement](#)

Find these resources in this lesson

- ❑ Handout – [Setting SMART Goals](#)

SPACE SETUP

- ❑ Chairs
- ❑ Demo table
- ❑ Pens
- ❑ Folders
- ❑ Computer, internet access, and projector, if available

ACTIVITY SUPPLIES*

- ❑ Silent timer or stopwatch (or app)
- ❑ A few seat and floor cushions (if available) to help participants be comfortable during meditation

Meditation to Boost Your Well-being Demo Script



SAY:

You may have heard about mindfulness meditation for health and wondered how to try it. Today we're going to talk about the benefits of meditation on our health and well-being, as well as a few of the most common types of meditation. We'll also try two short meditation practices.

WHAT IS MEDITATION?



SAY:

First, what is meditation? Meditation is a way to help you be more mindful and focused, let go of stress and anxiety, and feel calmer and more peaceful. It often involves breathing, quiet contemplation or sustained focus on something, such as an image, phrase or sound. You might also focus on counting beads, breathing or taking steps.



Most types of meditation have four elements in common:

1. A quiet location with as few distractions as possible
2. A specific physical position such as sitting, kneeling, lying down or walking
3. A focus of attention such as a word or phrase, an object, a sound or even your breath
4. An open attitude that lets thoughts, physical sensations, and external distractions come and go without judging them or wanting to control them



Every type is different, but the goal is usually to stay focused on the object of the meditation. That may be your breath, sensations in the body, a repeated phrase or mantra, a bell ringing or the flame of a candle. This helps train the mind to stay present and focus inward, being aware of distractions without allowing them to interfere with the practice.

WHY MEDITATE?



SAY:

So, why do people meditate? Research shows that practicing meditation may help you:

- Sleep better
- Feel more balanced and connected
- Improve working memory and ability to focus
- Manage stress
- Worry less
- Have fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety



There is some evidence that it also can help:

- Reduce high blood pressure
- Reduce inflammation
- Support the immune system
- Reduce symptoms of menopause, irritable bowel syndrome and colitis
- Possibly lower your risk of heart disease



The American Heart Association supports practicing mindfulness meditation as part of a healthy lifestyle.



Meditation may help your heart is by relieving stress. Stress is your body's natural alarm system. It releases a hormone called adrenaline that makes your breathing speed up and your heart rate and blood pressure rise. It kicks us into action, which can be a good thing when we're faced with a real danger or need to perform.



But that "fight or flight" response can take a toll on your body when it goes on too long or keeps happening.



Meditation provides a method for handling stress in a healthier way.



Mindfulness meditation can benefit mental and emotional health, too. It can help you become more aware of your feelings and less likely to be overwhelmed by them.

Meditation to Boost Your Well-being Demo Script (continued)



SAY:

Research suggests that meditation physically changes the brain in positive ways, which could help you:

- Increase your ability to process information
- Slow the effects of aging on your brain
- Control your response to stress and pain
- Improve sleep issues



There is also evidence that mindfulness meditation can help improve cognitive flexibility and skills such as:

- Attention
- Focus
- Emotional regulation
- Working memory



More research is needed, but meditation appears to help many people feel and function better. And the best part is, it costs nothing!

WAYS TO MEDITATE



SAY:

There are many different types of meditation, including:

- Mindfulness
- Breath-focused
- Loving-kindness (also called metta or compassion)
- Insight (also called Vipassana)
- Progressive muscle relaxation or body-scan
- Transcendental (also called mantra)
- Zen



I'll explain a few of the specific types. Insight or "vipassana" meditation is an awareness-focused mindfulness practice.



Loving-kindness meditation involves cultivating a feeling of compassion toward yourself, then toward a friend or loved one, then toward someone who is neutral in your life, then toward a difficult person, and then out to all beings in the universe.



In Transcendental Meditation, repeated thought of a word or phrase is used to focus the mind. This is called a "mantra" and is usually assigned to you by an experienced teacher.



Some people practice more than one form or a combination of forms.



Many forms of meditation are done sitting with your eyes closed or lowered. But there are also moving forms of meditation including qi gong, Tai Chi, yoga, walking and even dancing. Some say that just about anything can be done meditatively – with mindfulness and calm inward focus.



You can try different types of meditation to find the method that works best for you and that you will practice consistently. It can be as simple as sitting quietly and focusing on your breath. When your mind wanders, gently bring it back to the breath again. Gradually increase the amount of time you're able to stay focused.



If you're unsure how to get started, research different types that interest you. Look for local meditation groups or classes, or get instruction online or using an app.



Meditation can be a regular part of your healthy lifestyle to help you manage stress, sleep well and feel better. But remember, it should **not** replace proven lifestyle changes such as eating healthier, managing your weight, getting regular physical activity and not smoking. It's also **not** a substitute for medication or treatment your health care professional may have prescribed.

Meditation to Boost Your Well-being Activity Script

LESSON ACTIVITY PART 1 (8-10 MINUTES)



SAY:

Now, let's give it a try.

One of the simplest ways to meditate is to simply focus your attention on your breath, the inhale and exhale.



First, find a relaxed, comfortable, seated position. You can stay in your chair or sit on the floor, on a cushion or with your back against a wall. Do whatever is most comfortable for you. Keep your back upright, with your shoulders stacked over your hips, so staying in this position doesn't require too much effort.



Let your hands rest on your thighs, at your belly or next to you, wherever they're comfortable and can hang naturally with your shoulders relaxed. Relax your face and jaw so that you're not clenched. It may be helpful to think "lips together, teeth apart."



Your eyes may be open or closed, but you may find it easier to maintain your focus if you close your eyes. However, if you tend to get sleepy, you may want to keep your eyes open but with a soft, downward focus. Some people find it helpful to face a wall so they aren't distracted by people or items in the room. Or pick a neutral object to focus on.



Let yourself relax and notice how your body feels: the air on your skin, the connection with the floor or the chair, any areas of tightness or tension. Relax your belly and just breathe.



Tune into your breath. It may help to start by taking an exaggerated deep breath and open-mouthed, audible exhale to release any lingering tension. Then simply breathe naturally and observe each breath without trying to control it.

(Pause)



It may help to focus on where you feel the breath in your body: the rise and fall of your chest or the sensation of air flowing in and out through your nostrils or throat. Notice how when one breath ends, the next breath begins, without any effort on your part.

(Pause)



You may find that your mind wanders, distracted by thoughts or bodily sensations or sounds in the room. That's OK. Just notice that this is happening and gently bring your attention back to your breath.



Be kind to your wandering mind. It may help to say "thinking" or "wandering" in your head softly. Or picture the thought or sensation as a cloud passing by in an otherwise clear blue sky. And then gently redirect your attention right back to the breath.

(Pause)



Resist the urge to fidget or adjust your position. Notice how bodily sensations come and go even when you don't react to them.



We'll stay here for about five minutes. Stay with your breath, in silence. From time to time, you'll get lost in thought, notice it and then return to your breath.

Use a silent timer set for four to six minutes.

Monitor the class and repeat the helpful reminders above if you notice a lot of fidgeting or distraction.



Let's start to come back to the room now. Your breathing may have become shallower, so return to a normal, natural breath. Wiggle your fingers or toes and feel the sensations of your body again. Open your eyes slowly.

Give participants time to return and settle back into class mode.

Meditation to Boost Your Well-being Activity Script (continued)

DISCUSSION (5-7 MINUTES)

Lead the class in discussion about their experiences, without judgment. Some people may find the experience frustrating and challenging. Others will be relaxed, happy, or sleepy, etc.

Sample questions for discussion:



- How did that feel?
- What did you like and not like about it?
- How distracted were you on a scale of 1 to 10?
- Did anyone get sleepy or feel like you may have fallen asleep for a bit?
- What worked to refocus you on your breath and what didn't work as well?
- Do you feel more or less relaxed than before we started?
- What else did you notice?

LESSON ACTIVITY PART 2 (5-7 MINUTES)



SAY:

Now, let's try another simple type of mindfulness practice: a walking meditation.

Clear any obstacles or personal belongings, to create a circular path around the room.



Let's stand up and form a circle. Leave some space between you and your neighbors. Now everyone turn to your left. We'll begin walking slowly around the circle. I'll set the pace, so try to match my speed and slow down a bit if you get too close to the person in front of you. Don't rush. This pace may seem slow if you are used to walking faster. But remember, we're not trying to get anywhere. We can slow our thoughts and distractions by slowing our bodies.



Lower your gaze so that you focus is on the floor or the feet of the person in front of you. Find the position for your hands and arms that feels most comfortable and relaxed. They may be clasped in front of you or behind your back, held in prayer position at the chest, or simply relaxed at your sides. Experiment with what feels best.

(Pause)



Try to clear your mind. You might try matching each breath to a certain number of steps, or counting steps up to 10 and then starting the count over.



We'll walk for about two minutes.

Use a silent timer set for two to three minutes. Monitor the class and repeat the helpful reminders above if you notice a lot of fidgeting or distraction.



Okay, let's come to a stop and just stay where we are for a moment. If you need to, stretch or shake out your arms and legs.

(Pause)



Let's find our seats again and talk about how that felt.

DISCUSSION (8-10 MINUTES)

Lead the class in discussion about their experiences, without judgment. Use the previous sample questions again, and end with:



- Will you try meditation again at home?
- What will you do differently next time?

SPECIFIC

- What do you want to accomplish?

MEASURABLE

- How will you track your progress toward your goal?

ACHIEVABLE

- Is reaching your goal possible with your full effort?

REALISTIC

- Do you have the resources and ability to achieve your goal?
If not, how can you get them?

TIME-BOUND

- When will your goal be achieved?

EXAMPLE OF A SMART GOAL:

I will increase the number of fruit servings I eat daily by 2 cups within the next 3 months.

Personal SMART goal:
