

Quieting the Mind

American Medical Student Association

How is it done?

Quieting the mind can be done successfully in many ways. For ease of demonstration we will focus on a mantra meditation which is similar to Transcendental Meditation (TM).

- **First pick a word or phrase (mantra) that has meaning to you. This can be anything that brings you comfort. A neutral word may be peace, joy, one or love. A religious example might include God, Shalom, or the Lord is my shepherd.**
- **Find a quiet place to sit where there are few distractions**
- **Commit to a set amount of time. Time yourself by periodically glancing at a clock, if needed, but don't set an alarm.**
- **Sit in a comfortable position that you can maintain with your back straight but not stiff.**
- **Close your eyes and relax**
- **Allow yourself to notice your breath as you inhale and exhale. Breathe slowly and naturally. As you exhale, repeat your word or phrase. If you have a long phrase, feel free to divide half into inhalation and half with exhalation.**
- **When you notice your mind wondering, simply and gently return to your focus word. You will have thoughts of daydreams, tasks, worries, passions, etc. but simply say to yourself, "oh well" or "that's interesting" and return to the repetition.**
- **Assume a passive attitude and don't worry if you are doing it right or wrong. Some find it helpful to use the analogy of**

swimming in the ocean. The idea is to drop 4 or 5 feet below the surface and observe the waves of thoughts as they go by. As you focus on your word or phrase, the sea will calm.

- **At the end of your meditation, sit comfortably for a minute or two and stand slowly when ready.**

Tips

- **Meditate on an empty stomach. Food has been found to inhibit the beneficial physiologic effects on the body.**
- **If able, meditate with a friend, spouse or relative.**

Expectations

The process of quieting the mind is unique for each individual and having a goal to reach contradicts the mission of the activity. With continued practice though, you may find it helpful to learn of the various experiences and benefits meditation may bring.

- **The experienced practitioner will find it easier to quiet the mind. Where the beginner may have hundreds of thoughts during meditation, with time these will become less and less.**
- **Some may enter what is called, "the gap" which is void of thought and mantra. A time for simply being present in the moment.**
- **Increased sense of control in the world instead of being a passive "victim."**
- **Less focus on self or ego which enhances a sense of love and compassion.**
- **A deepening of spiritual life and/or religious experience.**
- **A feeling of being more connected to all people and things.**

A simple Russian peasant who lived around the middle of the nineteenth century sums up the journey of a meditative practice nicely.

At first, spiritual practitioners feel that the mind is like a waterfall, bouncing from rock to rock, roaring and turbulent, impossible to tame or control. In midcourse, it is like a great river, calm and gentle, wide and deep. At the end its boundaries expand beyond sight and its depth becomes unfathomable as it dissolves into the ocean, which is both its goal and Source.

Precautions

Meditation does not create unpleasant feelings. But quieting the mind may make you more aware of ones that are already there. This can be a very important step in healing but often requires the help of a professional counselor to make sure that these thoughts and feelings are dealt with in a constructive and educational way. If you experience any strong or disturbing emotions, please discuss them with your medical care provider.

Note: Quieting the mind can make one aware of preexisting stressors or memories that may require the aid of a counselor to deal with these emotions in a constructive way.

The dose

15-20 minutes one to two times a day. Meditating for shorter periods of time each day is better than one hour once a week.