

6.1 Meditation

Practice paying attention to what is happening right now.

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These days, meditation is gaining mainstream popularity, from dozens of meditation apps to the Netflix show Headspace, as well as through tens of thousands of academic papers on meditation. Meditation can reduce stress, provide health benefits, and help you be more aware and in control.

Meditation lets you observe your thought patterns and emotions in real time, reduce reactive responses, and change your behavior. Finally, perhaps the ultimate benefit of meditation is that it can be a path to liberate you from Ego Delusion—the idea that there exists a “you” that’s separate from the world and is subjectively more important than everything else.

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- Helps you feel calm and centered throughout the day.
- Allows you to observe your thoughts and feelings and decide how to act on them.
- Helps you gain insight into your thought patterns and the nature of consciousness.

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- Many people feel that they do not have time to meditate.
- People believe that they should succeed in meditation and may become frustrated when they feel that they’re failing.
- It can be hard to sit still for longer than a few minutes.

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There are multiple ways to meditate, including mindfulness meditation, body scans, walking meditation, Osho’s dynamic meditations, nondual meditations, and more. You can meditate with your eyes open or closed, in silence or guided, and even while engaged in other activities, like doing the dishes or conversing with people. The ultimate benefits of meditation are realized when it’s not done as a separate practice but rather integrated into your everyday life.

One of the most common forms of meditation is mindfulness. To practice mindfulness meditation, start by setting aside some time. Ten or twenty minutes is fine, but if you’re low on time, even five minutes can be beneficial. Sit with your eyes closed and observe what is happening moment by moment. Your objective is simply to notice everything that happens—thoughts, feelings, physical sensations, and sounds—without judgment and without holding on to anything that catches your attention.

You’re not trying not to think but rather to just notice your thoughts and other phenomena such as

feelings and sensations. If you catch yourself lost in thought, gently return to the practice of observation. And if you find that you're judging yourself as "not meditating well enough," simply observe that as another occurrence. It might be easiest, especially in the beginning, to meditate using a recorded guide or an app or even to attend live meditation sessions.

Attention is like a muscle, which meditation builds. The best way to build and maintain that muscle is with daily practice. Even a short meditation, repeated daily, is better than a long but sporadic one. As mentioned above, there are various ways to meditate, each with unique characteristics. While it's good to have a core practice you can rely on, it's also worthwhile to experiment and find what attracts you at any particular time. See Tools 6.2 and 6.3 for a few suggestions. Whatever you choose, try not to restrict your practice to formal sessions; this tool is meant to be integrated via short yet meaningful mindfulness moments throughout your day.

Remember, meditation is a life-long practice: it's not something you achieve and forget about. There are always higher levels of awareness to be reached in the present moment.

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1. Taft, Michael, *The Mindful Geek: Secular Meditations for Smart Skeptics* (Cephalopod Rex, 2015).
 2. Harris, Sam, *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion* (Simon & Schuster, 2015).
 3. Sam Harris' app Waking Up, <https://wakingup.com/>
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