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BE STRONG-HEARTED

YOUR GUIDE TO MINDFULNESS & MEDITATION

We live in a world that's seemingly switched on all the time, providing us little space to relax and just breathe. Work, family obligations, financial pressures and the general fast pace of life causes many of us to experience mild to severe anxiety and stress during the day and to stay awake at night worrying.

Psychiatrists and psychologists often blame the 'monkey mind' – a Buddhist term used to describe a mind that races from thought to thought, that's unsettled, restless and uncontrollable. It's an appropriate metaphor to describe a brain constantly bouncing between fears — real or imagined — such as health, finances, previous decisions and potential problems.

All that bouncing around — all that stress — is bad for the body, especially if it becomes a constant companion. It impacts everything from our sleep to our hearts.

For the latter, stress and anxiety can cause:

- High blood pressure
- Irregular heart rhythms
- Damage to your arteries
- Higher cholesterol levels
- Coronary artery disease or atherosclerosis, and
- A weakened immune system.

*America Psychological Association, 2015 Stress in America Survey.



Money & work are the top two sources of significant stress.*

While there are many anti-anxiety medications available, they're often perceived as crutches to help you get through the day. And most come with side effects, which is why physicians often turn to natural techniques such as calming exercises to help patients slow their minds, breathe, focus on the moment, acknowledge the good things in their lives and the world, and let go of negative thoughts.

Meditation is probably the most common and effective natural technique. Many studies have found it effective for helping manage anxiety and stress, as well as helping reduce blood pressure, ease pain and depression and improve sleep patterns. Meditation also strengthens coping skills better and

helps people managing conditions such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes live healthier lives.

Read on to learn how you can tackle your stress and **Be Strong-Hearted**. As part of our Year of Cardiovascular Health, we've put together this guide to Mindfulness and Meditation with your heart in mind. Inside you'll find:

- An intro to four different kinds of meditation.
- Tips on how to get started and how to blend mindfulness and meditation.

You can also go to our Be Strong-Hearted Inspiration Center at [MDVIP.com/BeStrongHearted](https://www.mdvip.com/BeStrongHearted) to learn more about mindfulness and other techniques that can help your cardiovascular health.

2019
is the year of
Cardiovascular
Health at MDVIP



4 TYPES OF MEDITATION

Meditation is practice that helps you develop internal focus, control thoughts, relax, find inner peace, concentrate and ease stress. Meditating regularly can train your brain to be more aware of actions and emotions and help you calmly process negative thoughts without judgment.

When you think about meditation, sitting in a lotus position probably comes to mind. But you don't have to sit on the floor. There's no right or wrong way to meditate. You can sit in a chair, kneel, stand, walk or lie down while meditating. Regardless of the position you choose, make sure your spine is straight, shoulders down and head and neck are aligned with your spine.

There also are different types of meditation – seven to be exact. Instructors can guide you through Kundalini yoga/meditation and Zen meditation and you can take a course to learn Transcendental meditation. The following four types you can try at home.

MINDFULNESS: Many forms of meditation include an element of mindfulness—a type of mental training to help you focus on the present moment and cope with negative thoughts and fears. Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, University of Massachusetts Medical School, pioneered the practice of mindfulness for health. Author of several books on the practice, including bestselling introductory guide *Mindfulness for Beginners*, Kabat-Zinn describes mindfulness as “the art of non-doing and really cultivating just being” instead of our brains being mentally consumed “on a path to losing our minds in the frenetic and hectic lives we lead.”

It's about being mindful of the present to help stop our minds from dwelling on the past or future.

METTA MEDITATION (or Loving-Kindness Meditation): The goal of metta meditation is developing a loving attitude toward everything and everyone in your life. This includes sources of stress,

difficult people and people who have hurt you. It's particularly helpful if you frequently experience frustration, anger, conflict and resentment. The practice involves sitting quietly, breathing deeply and repeating mantras of kindness and love to specific people and things until you feel compassion for others and for yourself.

AWARENESS OF BREATH MEDITATION: This form of meditation involves acutely focusing on your breath, making sure you're breathing slowly, rhythmically and with intention, so that you can ignore, even banish negative thoughts. Focusing on your breath also helps you become more flexible emotionally, improve your concentration and ease anxiety.

PROGRESSIVE MEDITATION, AKA BODY-SCAN MEDITATION: This form of meditation is particularly effective for coping with pain and general anxiety because it helps you relax. Practice progressive meditation by laying still and visualizing the tension releasing from each part of your body, top to toe.

HOW TO START A MINDFULNESS MEDITATION PRACTICE

Mindfulness meditation involves two components – mindfulness and meditation. The key to mindfulness is staying focused on the moment.

It sounds easy, but it will take a few tries before you get good at mindfulness meditation. Many of us find our minds dwelling on the past or worried about the future throughout the day. Once you've controlled your thoughts, turn your attention to your senses – what do you feel, see, smell, hear or taste? Notice the sights, sounds and smells around you, or the colors, fragrances and textures of your food at each meal.

Once you've mastered mindfulness, you'll truly be living your life in the present and find meditating easier and more productive.

Beginning meditation is relatively easy. There are no real rules. It's a matter of taking time each day to still your body and clear your thoughts. To relax your body, lay down, sit, kneel or stand and get comfortable.

Close your eyes, focus on your breathing and imagine a white light traveling from the top of your head downward, passing over every part of your body, lingering for a moment, easing stress.

Many people dedicate early mornings or late evenings to meditating.

If you're having a tough time focusing on your breath, try this technique:



Breathe calmly and slowly. Inhale for four seconds, hold your breath for a second, then slowly exhale for four seconds. Focus on your thoughts, letting negative thoughts flow out of your mind. Concentrate on small sensations. You may feel frustrated first, experiencing incessant chatter of your monkey mind. But stick with it -- breathing slowly and bringing your mind back to the present.

Not thrilled with sitting or lying down? Meditate on the go. You can meditate while standing in line at the grocery store or going for a walk. Just keep your mind clear and concentrate on breathing.

And for a mindfulness meditation, simply add the mindfulness component to the meditation, tuning in your five senses. Mindfulness meditation is about contemplating things you may

not normally acknowledge as part of a busy day: your refrigerator humming in the background, a bird chirping, or a branch tapping on your window.

What do you smell? Perhaps it's the freshness of the air or the fragrance of shampoo lingering on your hair. Consider how you're feeling: Are you cold or warm? How does the texture of your clothing feel on your skin? Is the wind wafting over your face? Consider all the sensations you are feeling around you.

After practicing for a few weeks, you'll find it easier to slip into a state of relaxation with your mind fully aware, in the moment as time seems to slow down. Besides relaxing, mindfulness meditation is known for its practitioners calmly drifting into a deep and peaceful sleep. If you struggle with insomnia, mindful meditation is worth trying.