

Helpful Tips for Developing a Daily Mindfulness Meditation Practice

by Joshua David O'Brien, O.M.

OK. No doubt about it. It's not easy to meditate on a daily basis. It seems that for most of us, walking over to the cushion or chair and sitting down to meditate is amazingly complicated. In fact, the greatest difficulty for anyone new to meditation practice is the simple act of sitting down. Ultimately, it's just a matter of making the decision to do it and following through. Here are 17 tips that might help you do both.

Tip #1. Get Curious

Take a look inside and ask yourself the following questions:

What are my unconscious attitudes towards meditation?

What's going on inside that's complicating my decision to meditate regularly?

Tip #2. Get Motivated

You probably know this already, but formal mindfulness meditation practice is just plain good for you. Decades of ongoing research from the fields of medicine, psychology, and neurology have proven that a consistent and daily practice is profoundly good for your physical, mental, and emotional health.

Physical Benefits Include:

Elevated immune system function

Less frequency and duration of illnesses

Improved management of pain

Decreased heart rate and blood pressure

Improved sleep and digestion

Increased energy

Mental Benefits Include:

Improved brain function, intelligence, and memory

Improved decision-making ability

Emotional Benefits Include:

Improved management of stress

Less irritability, anxiety, and depression

Improved interpersonal relationships

Increased resilience to change

Regular practice is also good for everyone around you. As you grow in presence, empathy, equanimity, compassion, kindness, forgiveness, and happiness you contribute these qualities to every relationship you have. Calling these benefits to mind might provide you with the extra motivation you need to practice regularly.

Tip #3. Start Small

Avoid grand exaggerated efforts. Start off nice and easy and take it slow. Try sitting for just five minutes a day for one week and see how that works for you. If you're successful, add five minutes every week until you're meditating for at least 20 - 45 minutes per day. If, however, you have trouble setting aside even five minutes, you can bet there are some unconscious principles at work that are holding you back in other areas of your life too. (*Refer to tip #1 and #16*)

Tip #4. Regularity

When you first start out on the journey to meditate daily, it can be helpful to experiment with what time of the day you choose to meditate. Maybe you're a morning person, or maybe it works well for you to start the day off right by meditating first thing in the morning before the demands of the day press in on you. Maybe you'd like to meditate in the afternoon and use the time to reboot and replenish. Maybe you feel more connected with the stillness of the evening, or feel it will help you get a better night's sleep by meditating just before you go to bed. Once you've found a time that feels best for you, however, stick with it. This will help build a meditation practice into your routine.

Tip #5. Make it a Habit

Contrary to prevailing wisdom, establishing a habit takes approximately 66 days, not 21. Set a goal to meditate every day for about two months and follow through as consistently as possible.

Tip #6. Schedule the Time

Do you use a calendar to help you remember important appointments? Schedule yourself a time to meditate. You wouldn't want to miss an appointment with your child's teacher, a client, or a good friend, so don't miss this important appointment with yourself.

Tip # 7. Track Your Practice

Some people find it a very helpful to keep track of the days they've meditated on a calendar. If you've meditated today, mark the date with an X or a slash. As you can probably guess, this motivates some and discourages others. You'll know right away which category you fit in.

Tip #8. Set an Alarm

Do you have an alarm function on your phone or your watch? Set it to go off at a certain time every day. When the alarm sounds you know it's time to sit for meditation.

Tip #10. Add it to Your To-Do List

Do you use a to-do list to help you organize your day? Add time to meditate to the list. It can help reinforce your decision if you see the appointment in print. This really helps some people, but not others. If it starts to feel like just another item on your already overwhelming list, stop adding it and try another technique.

Tip #11. Post-It

Leave yourself little notes that will help you remember your commitment to meditate daily like, "Meditate," "Breathe," "Be Mindful," "Practice Awareness," "Remember," etc.

Tip #12. Journal

Keep a journal of your meditative experiences. It's wonderful to look back and see where you've been on your inner journey.

Tip #13. Add a Dash of Ceremony

Make your time to meditate beautiful and meaningful by adding a ceremonial touch to your practice. Take off your shoes, dim the lighting, light some candles and incense, and sit down with presence and mindful attention.

Tip #14. Kill Your T.V.

Replace some of your television viewing time with meditation practice time.

Tip #15. Meditate with a Group

Meditating with a group on a regular basis can provide you with a sense of community and belonging which will help to reinforce your meditation lifestyle. You'll also find it helpful to develop relationships with other people who are interested in meditation too. There aren't many places where we're invited to speak openly about our inner journey. A meditation community can be one such place.

Tip #16. Sign a Commitment Form

In my work as a Mindfulness Coach, I have every new client sign and date a "Practice Commitment" form. Signing a "contract" might help to keep you accountable. You're welcome to email me for a copy.

Tip #17. Enlist the Help of a Meditation Teacher or Coach

Sometimes it's hard to see the forest for all of the trees. You might benefit from spending time with a mindfulness coach who can help you uncover some of the unconscious principles operating in your life that are keeping you from practicing daily. A mindfulness coach can also help you to avoid misconceptions about meditation, common obstacles to practice, and common difficulties.

