



# LIFE IN BALANCE

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Beginning a Meditation Practice

This is not an article to explain or convince you of the benefits of meditation. This is for the people who want to start a meditation practice and feel overwhelmed or don't know where to start.

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Start small and practical. For many of the techniques below, start small and set a timer for one minute. Each day, add on 30 seconds as you become more comfortable. Pick any of the techniques below and try it on for that minute. While you are doing these, your mind might wander to what you have to do later that day or that argument you could have handled better. That's ok. Meditation is a practice. It can be uncomfortable to slow down, and even not succeed at something right away. That's ok. Meditation is a practice.

**Breath:** One of my favorite meditations to do with clients and classes is to have them simply notice inhalation and exhalation. You don't need to change your inhale or exhale in anyway, just pay attention to your own natural breath in and natural breath out as if it were precious and priceless; it is after all. If this feels very hard to do it might be helpful to practice some different breathing techniques. For example, try to make your inhale and your exhale equal lengths. Breathe in to the count of four, exhale to the count of four. As you practice this technique you might find you can make inhale and exhale longer.

**Mantra:** Are you finding your breath intriguing, but you feel like you need a slight shift? Turn your breath meditation into a mantra meditation. Mantra translates to “tool for the mind.” You can repeat your mantra to yourself silently. I enjoy inhaling to the word “let” and exhaling to the word “go.” Whatever you are working through in your life can become a mantra. Stressed or overwhelmed? Try inhaling “I am” and exhaling “calm.” I hope this goes

without saying but try to make your mantra something neutral or positive. Mantra can help you manifest what you want so ditch any focus on your made up inadequacies. Feeling lonely? Flip the script to “I am surrounded with love.”

**Kinesthetic:** Sometimes using your own body parts can help keep you focused. Sit comfortably. Bring your awareness to your right hand. Wiggle the right fingers a bit. Then on your inhale, open your palm. On your exhale, close your palm. Inhale to open, exhale to close. After several rounds of breath, pause the motion and just observe what you feel in your right hand vs. your left hand. Repeat with the left hand if you like.

**Body Scan:** This is commonly done lying down. There are some great free recordings of body scan meditations on the web. All a body scan does is bring awareness to different parts of your body. Start at your head and name the different parts of the body silently. Not doing anything with them but bringing your attention there. Feel, crown of the head, forehead, right eyebrow, left eyebrow, nose, top lip, bottom lip, etc. all the way down to your toes. You might have a new appreciation for all the feeling felt in your elbow if you can slow down and listen to it.

**Candle Gazing:** Use your gaze as a focal point to boost concentration. You could really use any object in your vision for a few minutes, but there's something warm and cozy in the winter about lighting a candle and simply watching it flicker in the winter

months. Observe the subtle changes in color, size and texture. Alternatively, if you are near a body of water, you can do the same. Even on a calm day without a lot of wind, fire and water have a lot of movement. See if you can notice the slight but profound shifts. Maybe that translates into noticing the slight shifts in yourself and the people around you with time.

**Walking Meditation:** Just can't sit still? Go on a meditation walk. Put your phone on silent and leave your earbuds behind. Intentionally pay attention to your feet on the ground. What do you hear? What do you see? What does the air feel like on your face? The first time I took a truly silent walk in my neighborhood on my regular walk route, I saw trees and signs that I had totally missed when walking the dog or talking on my phone!

**Open Awareness Meditation:** Simply sit and notice what comes to your senses and your awareness. Honestly, for many folks in the US this is the most challenging. Give it a try, if it's too hard, practice one of the other techniques and come back to this one every so often.

Just like a sport, the more you practice meditation the easier it gets. So, if you are struggling in the beginning, keep at it. After years of meditating, I still have days where my mind gets busy. If you keep trying, you are doing it right. I truly believe a home meditation practice is achievable and rewarding, but if you feel like you need some one-on-one coaching, visit [PenfieldYogaTherapy.com](http://PenfieldYogaTherapy.com) to schedule a free phone consultation.