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part 4 of a 6-part series

getting started: fitting it in

FITTING MEDITATION into your life



Meditation with others gives a big boost to your practice. On this page: A sitting session about to start at the New York Insight Meditation Center.

Going to work, taking care of family, socializing, exercising, housekeeping. Whew. What busy lives we lead! **How can we find time to include one more thing**—even something as valuable as mindfulness practice?

In this fourth installment of our Getting Started series, we show you ways to weave meditation into your life by **1** finding a good instructor, **2** choosing a meditation program, **3** practicing with other people, and **4** creating a personalized "meditation diet" that helps you fit it into your busy schedule.

Getting into meditation practice can seem like a VERY BIG DEAL. It can sound like a project that involves becoming a totally new you. But when you get right down to it, there's no new you whom you need to find.

What most of us want is to find, within our ordinary life, some ways to get in touch with ourselves and find a reservoir of composure we can draw on when the going gets tough. Some kind of regular mindfulness practice helps us to tap into that reservoir, to call upon it in the middle of a tough day, which is not always easy.

When something unexpected or unpleasant happens—a driver cuts us off in traffic, a boss criticizes work we've done, a loved one is diagnosed with cancer—our body's fight-or-flight response, so useful to us when we face real danger, kicks in. Our heart beats rapidly. We flush with anger or remorse. We feel put upon. We want justice. Or relief.

But every one of those hiccups or setbacks in our daily lives is also an opportunity. In those moments of stress, it is in our power to step back, breathe, feel the sensations in the body, examine them with curiosity, and move on.

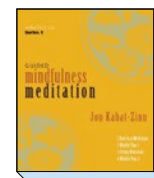
The challenge, of course, is remembering to do that more often. It doesn't happen of its own accord. That's why a regular meditation practice can make such a difference. It helps us to develop an awareness of what is happening to our bodies and minds in those challenging moments. And in that moment of awareness, we can pause.

In the following pages, we explore ways to deepen and strengthen the mindfulness habit. Everything begins with some regular practice. If we can find as little as five or ten or 20 minutes a day, or twice a day, we're on our way. We can adjust the amount of time later, depending on schedule and inclination.

But for many of us it's difficult to start and difficult to carry on. Our daily practice can feel isolated if we are only doing it alone. And while the time spent by ourselves is important and powerful, we can deepen our experience by reaching out to others—a meditation teacher and a group of fellow meditators—or going on an occasional retreat or taking a course.

Photographs by Joshua Simpson
Illustrations by Jason Lee

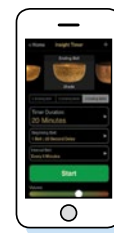
Resources to Keep You Going



GUIDED MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

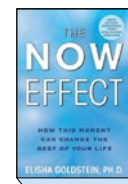
By Jon Kabat-Zinn

The next best thing to taking an MBSR course with the founder. First in a 3-part series.



INSIGHT TIMER

A no-frills tool for timing a meditation. Those who want to share meditation with an online community or group of friends can do so.



THE NOW EFFECT How a Mindful Moment Can Change the Rest of Your Life

By Elisha Goldstein

Filled with short practices to insert throughout the day.

Choosing an Instructor

Looking for instruction from someone? It's important to have your eyes open and make an informed choice.

If you want to make mindfulness a part of your life, you'll probably want to consider working with a meditation teacher or instructor. You can even do that online using a video chat format of some kind, but even then the same principles apply.

Learning mindfulness is a relationship. Even if you start with a book, you're learning from the author. If you and your teacher begin a dialogue, you can dig deeper into your life and be more present for it as it unfolds from moment to moment. That dialogue—much of it held in silence—will help your mindfulness practice unfold more creatively.

But how do you find a person who's right for you? Here are a few questions to consider.

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Getting Started: Fitting It In was compiled by writer Teo Furtado and Barry Boyce, editor-in-chief of *Mindful*, in consultation with:

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1

Do you have good chemistry with them?

Think about qualities you'd like to develop and see if the instructor embodies them. If you're going to learn from someone on an ongoing basis, you need to connect strongly.

2

Are they open and accessible?

You want someone who's relaxed and at ease, who comes across as present, caring, and compassionate. Equally important, you want someone who can work with your schedule.

3

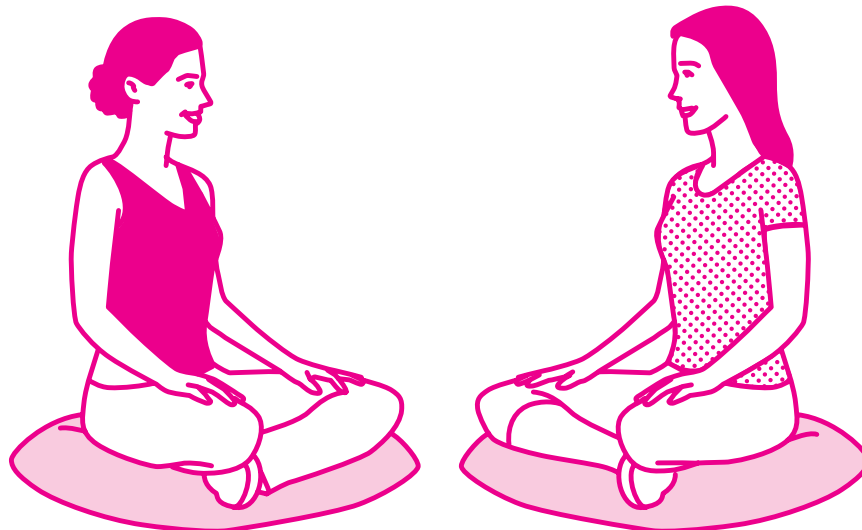
Do they have a deep understanding of the practice?

While it's important that you and your instructor get along well, it's also important for them to be credentialed and have a strong personal practice to draw from when teaching.

4

Could they regard you like a friend?

They may not be a "friend" per se, but they're like one. Friends look in the same direction—not toward each other, but toward what's best for each person. Can you and the person teaching you communicate at eye level?



Choosing a Program

Mindfulness offers tools to explore the human condition in all its variety. You can learn basic mindfulness meditation in any number of ways. If you like, you can also find a program that is targeted toward a particular problem, such as depression or addiction, or need, such as leadership or childbirth. Here's an overview of the many types of programs at your disposal.

Mindfulness-Based Initiatives

Ever since Jon Kabat-Zinn formed Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction in 1979, it has steadily grown, to the point where you can find MBSR in any major city—and beyond. There's also been an explosion in related programs for people facing all sorts of challenges.

For example, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy, with its strong emphasis on inquiry, is a powerful way for people with depression to explore their mental habits. Mindfulness-Based Childbirth

and Parenting helps parents-to-be cultivate lifelong practices for mindful living and parenting. Mindfulness-Based Eating Awareness Training gives special attention to one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward food. Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention is helpful for people who wish to develop a lifestyle that supports their recovery.

There are many more of these “mindfulness-based interventions” and a good Internet search will turn them up.

Meditation Centers

Although many meditation centers around the country are associated with religious organizations, you can find centers or programs that make room for people who don't want a religious orientation toward meditation. Washington, D.C., for example, has the Insight Meditation Community of Washington, which offers a huge number of community meditation opportunities, retreats, workshops, and free online talks and guided meditations. There are similar

centers in cities throughout North America. You can call to find out the range of meditation offerings they have.

Try, also, a center for mindfulness at a university near you. UCLA, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Massachusetts are just a few of the universities that have meditation programs open to the public. If you're unsure about your local school's program, call to find out if they encourage community participation.

Online and Apps

One of the benefits of living in a digital age is that we can pretty much access whatever we want. That is certainly true of meditation. Every major meditation center or university has an online component, offering you virtual courses, guided

meditations, information on retreats and workshops. There are also new apps you can try, like Headspace. Type in the word “meditation” in your search engine and you'll quickly see the remarkable number of programs available to you.

Targeted Training Programs

Professionals who want to deepen their practice can take advantage of any number of mindful meditation programs specifically designed to meet their needs. For example, CARE for Teachers (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education)—recognizes the stresses that teachers work under and adapts MBSR techniques to help educators improve their well-being and better nurture

their students. Mindfulness-based Mind Fitness Training—uses body-based awareness and attention exercises to help police, firefighters, and soldiers cope with the effects of extreme, often prolonged, stress. The Institute for Mindful Leadership helps leaders find the space they need to be more reflective, to make room for more intuition, to become better team-builders.

How Hanging Out with Other Meditators Helps

Sitting quietly and mindfully is powerful no matter when you do it, alone or with others. But here are some compelling reasons to consider a regular group practice.

1

Learn from Others

Sharing meditation experiences with others helps you see the world beyond your own life story. If you live remotely or are shut in, call a group and see if someone will video-chat with you or visit with you in your home.

2

Practice Longer

People are more likely to sit for longer periods of time and settle into meditation more easily. Perhaps it's merely the fact that when you're at home you can jump up the second your phone rings, but in a group you will stay put.

3

Get More Committed

Developing a regular meditation practice on your own can be a bit challenging. It's nice to have a buddy or two. When you commit to practicing with others, you're more likely to commit to your own practice, even when you are all by yourself.

4

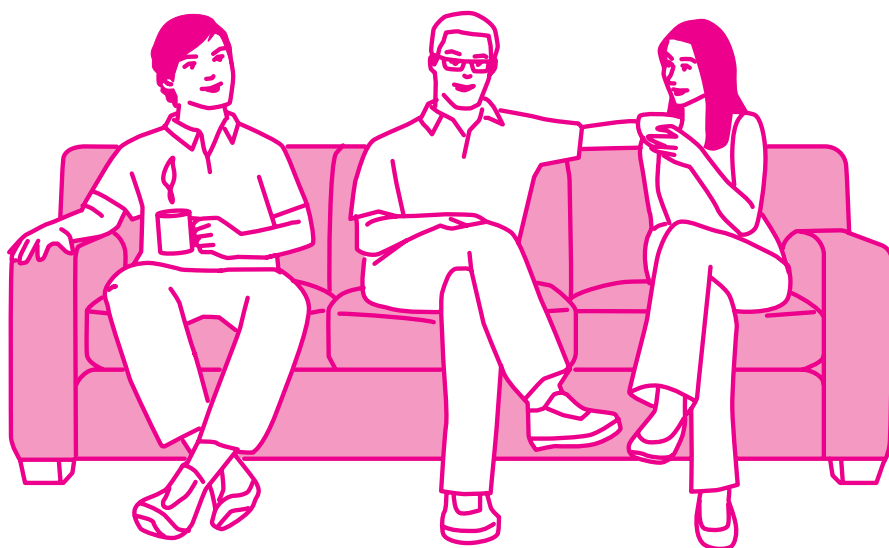
Make New Friends

You get to meet like-minded people. Extraordinary long-term friendships can arise from practicing together.

5

Go Deeper

In groups, people talk together about meditation practice, not just the experience, but the insights and theories behind it. These discussions allow you to deepen your experience and find renewed inspiration and motivation.



For a selection of video and other resources on maintaining a meditation practice, go to mindful.org/mindfulness-practice

Friends Help You See What You Can't See

As the executive director of the New York Insight Meditation Center, **Sebene Selassie** knows what helps you keep going with meditation practice—and the benefits of having fellow travelers on the path.

What do you say to someone with “no time to meditate”?

We're all disciplined about something, even if it's brushing our teeth or keeping up with a favorite TV show. If you're busy, let go of one thing—read one fewer article online or skip an episode of *House of Cards*. You need to make the space for space.

As a seasoned meditator, what's still hard for you?

I'm amazed I can still perceive challenging experiences in life as “mistakes” and want them to be different from what they are.

How has being part of a meditation group made a difference in your life?

On the meditation path, it's helpful to have fellow travelers, people interested in exploring the same questions. If you're a bird-watcher, others might notice a bird you're not familiar with. In this case, they might notice something in the mind. And if you're sitting in a group, oddly you settle into your body more easily. You're less likely to fidget or get up and leave, because you've made the commitment to be there with whatever comes up. It can foster deep friendship.

Countless times fellow practitioners have supported me emotionally, including during two bouts with cancer.

Do you recommend people connect with a teacher?

Yes. Some people are natural self-teachers, but most of us benefit from guidance and instruction when learning something new. We're not practicing to become super-meditators. We're practicing to gain some insight and wisdom. So, I've found it's definitely helpful to have some insightful and wise people around.

Would you suggest beginners try a retreat?

Very much so. I enjoy the space and time to develop and sustain spaciousness and ease long enough for deeper insights to arise. Then I can tap into that ease more readily in daily life.

What do you do to promote diversity at your center?

We need to understand that the way we teach and who is teaching will have an impact on people looking for something that mirrors their own experience, so having a diverse body of leaders, teachers, and volunteers is vital. But it does take time.



The Meditation Diet

Just as a balanced diet mixes food types in sensible servings to keep your body healthy, a meditation diet helps you develop a healthy mind. Step back, look at your time as a whole, and serve up meditation—in various portion sizes—to enrich your life.

It's tempting to think "I'll develop more mindfulness after my job is less demanding, my kids are grown, and I have more time." We're waiting for the perfect schedule to magically align with our desires. Yet we may need the benefits of mindfulness even more when we think we have the least time to pursue them!

Like a good diet, adopting a mindfulness practice is a matter of looking at the habits of our life and making choices about what we can reasonably do, setting an intention, and getting the help we need to stick to it.

A good meditation diet mixes some daily practice with pauses throughout the day, something else we do weekly and/or monthly, and if possible something longer and deeper that we do once or more a year.

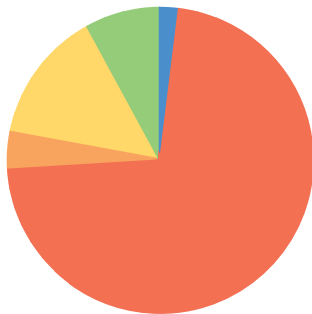
Your personal circumstances dictate what works for you. There is no single right way to do it. If you struggle to artificially jam meditation into your day, it will become an unpleasant tug of war. In the end, marrying meditation with your life is a matter of balance. ●

What's the Right Mix for You?

Matching up meditation with your circumstances is the way to make it a vital part of your life.

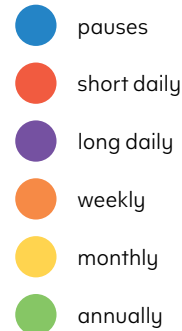
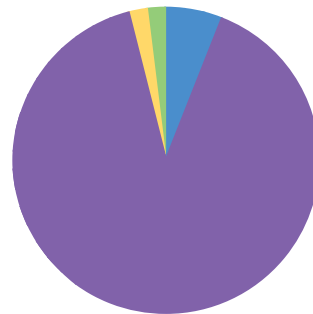
STAY-AT-HOME

DAD Eric takes care of two young kids while his wife Jean starts her career. He emphasizes short sessions twice daily, a monthly visit to a meditation group, and one weekend a year of retreat.



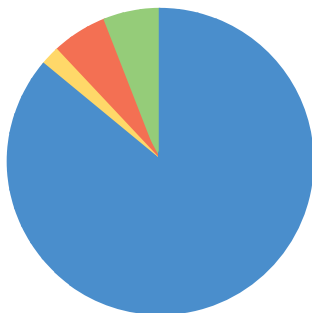
GRANDMOTHER

Kimiko volunteers part-time at a hospital. She's long had a daily practice, and now she sits for 45 minutes every morning and 30 in the evening—sometimes her granddaughter joins her.



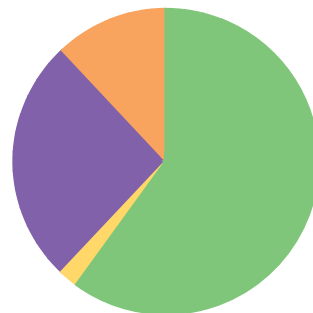
CAREER MOM

Jean helps raise the kids while building her counselling practice. She takes short pauses between clients, ten minutes at the end of the day in her office, and a two-day mindfulness training yearly.



COLLEGE GRAD

Jose is devoting two years to recharging and charting his course. He sits 90 minutes most days, a whole day with a group some weekends, and is planning to do a 10-day retreat in the spring and in the fall.



PAUSES

Life gives us lots of chances to stop, breathe, and refresh. Learn to respond to the opportunities.

SHORT DAILY

A five- to ten-minute practice once, twice, or three times a day will refresh your awareness.

LONG DAILY

If possible, try to take a half-hour to hour once or twice a day. It can make the mini-pauses more powerful.

WEEKLY

Many groups hold a weekly sit and a talk. See if that works for you. If needed, alternate with your partner.

MONTHLY

Doing something special 12 times a year will make a difference. A half-day sit perhaps.

ANNUALLY

Look at your whole year and see if you can bite off a longer stretch of time for a silent retreat.

Meditation: what fits on your plate?

If you think of meditation as one-size-fits-all, it can seem hard to fit in. It helps to consider lots of ways to bring it to your life: short, sweet pauses, middling bites, and something it will take a while to sink your teeth into.



Stay tuned! In Getting Started #5, learn ways to bring meditation to your workplace. See our December 2014 issue.

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