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INDIA

# Healthcare

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Meditation

**Nourishing  
the Mind**

**Importance of the  
Thyroid Gland**

UP YOUR IMMUNITY  
THROUGH NUTRITION

**Karan Deol's**

Fitness Mantras

**COVID-19**

guide for Pregnancy,  
Cancer patients &  
Smokers

Chef Sanjeev Kapoor's  
**easy healthy  
recipes**



# The Art of Stillness

Meditation has long since been known to have positive effects that include reduction in stress levels, increased concentration, and self-healing. In these days of stress, and with the lockdown in place, practising meditation can help you stay calm, use your time productively, and improve your health in several ways. For those who don't know how to, there are even apps that help you meditate through various methods. Healthcare India explores this age-old practice that is getting increasingly popular  
by Bindu Gopal Rao

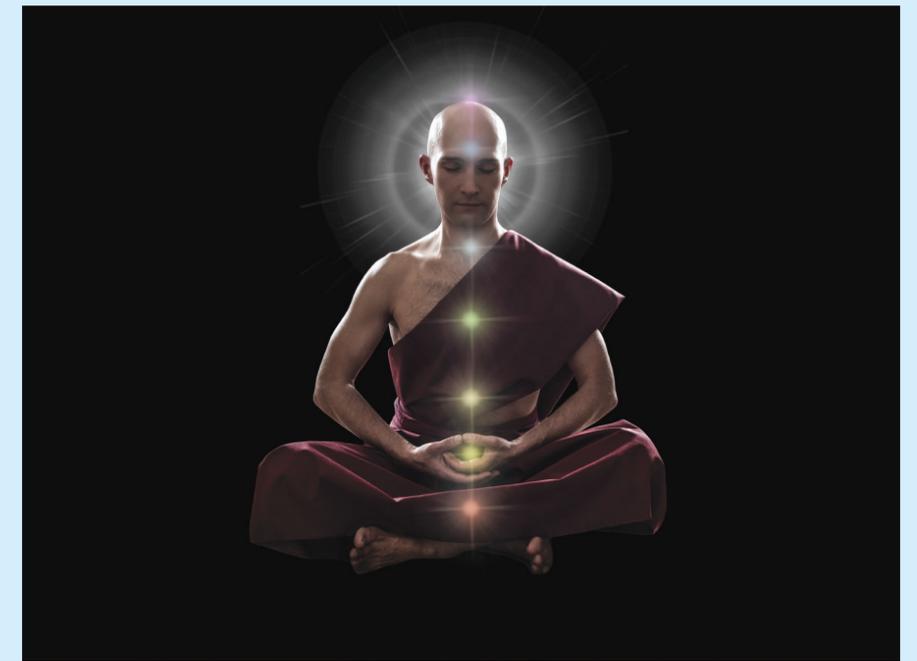


**M**editation, a practice that dates back to several centuries, is a simple yet profound gift that humanity could receive. It is the art of allowing you to connect to who yourself are, go deep within, helping you calm your mind, release tension, stress, and find balance and peace. With the growing hustle in our lives, and situations where every person is stressed for most part of their day, adding small and easy meditative practices can help bring about brilliant shifts in your mindset and lives.

## Historical Routes

Meditation has been around in India for many thousands of years and dates back to 5000 to 3500 BCE. Meditation is a practice where the technique of mindfulness or focussing attention on any particular object, activity or thought is practised by an individual. This is done to get the focus and attention to achieve a clear and calm, emotionally stable state of mind. In fact, meditation as such is hard to define, as there are varying practices between traditions and within them as well. Meditation has been practised since time immemorial across religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, and all of these have often had the same goal – to show the path towards enlightenment and self-realisation.

The earliest records of meditation find its origins in the Hindu traditions of Vedanta. There are many popular forms of meditation including mindfulness, spiritual and focussed meditation, through movement, *mantras* and transcendental meditation. Incidentally, the word meditation comes from meditari, that means to think/to exercise the mind; and mederi, meaning, to heal, in Latin. It is said that it was the great saint Gyaneshwar who started teaching meditation way back in the 14th century. There are references, however, to rishis meditating in the Himalayas well before that, and there is mention in our epics, Ramayan and Mahabharat too.



Guided meditation is a great way to start a practice. While listening to guided meditation, make sure to follow the instructions, as they are like rails that keep a train on its tracks, guiding you to your higher self or deeper self, as you may call it. Be open to the experience, without any preconceived notions or judgements. Remember, it is actually a revelation of the unknown till you finally connect with your true self

## Mental Musings

“Guided meditation is a technique where you are asked to focus on a specific imagery to aid relaxation. You try to use as many senses as possible, such as smell, sight, sound and texture. Usually, this process can be aided through a teacher or a guide. Qi gong is a practice that is part of traditional Chinese medicine, and generally combines meditation, relaxation, physical movement and breathing exercises to restore and maintain balance. Likewise, a form of gentle Chinese martial art, Tai chi involves a series of self-paced



Karishma Chawla

movements in a slow and graceful manner while continuing to do deep breathing,” says nutritionist and lifestyle educator, Karishma Chawla. Dr Amulya Seth, Consultant Psychiatrist, Columbia Asia Hospital, Ghaziabad, avers, “Mediation is a habit to calm your mind and training it to focus. Mental and physical stress increase levels of the stress hormone cortisol that disrupts sleep, increases blood pressure, promotes depression and anxiety, and contributes to fatigue and cloudy thinking. Meditation helps control these. It also influences emotional health and helps in creating a more positive outlook towards life. It also improves sleep and attention span.”

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that keep a train on its tracks, guiding you to your higher self or deeper self, as you may call it. Be open to the experience, without any preconceived notions or judgements. Remember, it is actually a revelation of the unknown till you finally connect with your true self. If you find more calmness, relaxation, clarity of mind, and compassion towards others, then your meditation is doing its work. And you may even notice random happiness throughout the day. A correct, long-term meditation practice will help you develop a feeling of detachment from desires; you begin to perceive yourself controlling them, rather than allowing them to control you.

In the words of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, "There is no problem if you have your desires, but don't let the desires have you. Meditation happens with the attitude, 'I want nothing, I do nothing, I am nothing'."

### Myriad Forms

Prānāyāma is the practice of breath control in yoga that synchronises the breath with movements of the asanas, as well as distinct breathing exercises done independently and typically after the asanas. Vipassana is known to be the oldest of Buddhist meditation practices. It is a codified system of training one's mind, and entails a set of exercises that are dedicated towards making one more and more aware of his or her life experiences. Rakhee Mehta, Founder, Magicrise, says, "Vipassana is a gentle yet thorough technique of meditation. This is an inward journey that focusses on deep interconnection between the mind and body, which is realised through disciplined attention to the physical sensations. The principle of gaining focus through discipline is a very ancient practice, and can be seen in varied traditional arts such as kung-fu, tai chi, dance and the like. In the case

of Vipassana, the principle of silence is applied to quieten the stir within and outside, to reach a point of balance in our fast-paced lives."

Shweta Bhatia, a registered dietitian with the Indian Diabetic Association, bodybuilder and founder of Mind your Fitness, enlists the different forms of

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– Rakhee Mehta

meditation. "Mantra meditation is the easiest form of meditation, which can be easily practised by anyone. It heals the body, mind and spirit. The Yogic Gaze (trataka) meditation technique involves using a normal candle, but depending on your choice, you can use some other object also. The candle is usually set at an arm's distance and at eye level. Then start gazing at it with open eyes. Chakra meditation involves search and activation of the chakras of the body. Raja Yoga meditation fills the heart of the practitioner with supreme joy, which is a great experience in itself. Zazen meditation was done by the Buddha. It calms the body and mind and helps the practitioner to know the nature of existence. Nada Yoga is "union through sound", where sound elevates the person at a spiritual level and undergoes inner transformation."



Shweta Bhatia



### Mind Matters

Meditation is best known for reducing stress and anxiety, and there has been a study that has indicated that mindfulness and Zen like meditation can significantly reduce stress when practised over three months. Another study revealed that meditation literally reduces the density of brain tissue associated with anxiety and worrying. Dr Vivek Chandel, Wellness Manager, Fazlani Natures Nest, says, "Mindfulness meditation increases your psychological functioning, and in the process, improves your sense of wellbeing. Loving kindness meditation enhances brain areas associated with mental processing and empathy, and hence is based on compassion. It also increases your sense of social connectedness. Meditation basically also improves memory and your ability to make decisions."

The cornerstone of The Art of Living programmes is the healing breath, known as the Sudarshan Kriya. This unique breathing practice is a potent energiser, where oxygen enters each of the cells and removes negative emotions from the body and releases tensions, frustrations and anger, clears anxiety, depression, and lethargy, giving relief to both, the mind and body. With regular practice, one becomes calm and centered, with a clearer mind. A sense of joy in the moment prevails, and one is able to smile from the heart. Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar has said, "In ancient times, meditation was used for enlightenment: to find the self. And meditation is a way to overcome problems, as well as any unhappiness. Meditation is also a way to improve one's abilities. The social ills of today, the stress and tension, calls for one to meditate. The more responsibility you have in life, the greater is the need for meditation. People who have nothing to do, may not need meditation as such. The busier you are, the less time you have, the greater desires you have, that much more you need meditation. It relieves you of stress, and helps you better accomplish your tasks and ambition."



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### Yogic Concentration

Shiv Yog meditation is a deep state of physical, mental, and emotional relaxation, which allows an individual to access one's subtle body. It was popularised by Dr Avdhoot Shivanand, a celebrated Himalayan Yogi, spiritual scientist, and social reformer from India. "Through this process, one can fill all their subtle bodies with powerful cosmic energy. Every cell down to atomic and sub-atomic levels, fills up with this cosmic energy, resulting in raised frequencies. It is possible to experience raised frequencies through the body that ensues. A deep sense of calm, peace, and tranquility descends upon the person meditating. In this state, it is likely that any trauma of the past could be recollected at the conscious level. However, on the state of deep calm, it is possible to witness the incidents without emotionally reacting to them. This is also how healing happens, as the person is able to distance themselves from the

situation and look at it impartially. One can unlock the key to happiness, joy, prosperity and perfect health through the sacred science of Shiv Yog," says Dr Prakash Kalmadi – Founder and Director at KARE Ayurveda and Yoga Retreat (KARE). Dr Sukeshini Ramteke, Consultant Physiotherapist and Sport Physiotherapist, AXIS Hospital, Mumbai adds, "As an individual becomes regular with practising meditation, there is a visible increase in joy, peace, and enthusiasm. This happens because of the increased prana (life force energy) in the body. Meditation can reduce high blood pressure as well as the blood lactate level, and reduce anxiety attacks. It can also help lower any tension-related pain and increase serotonin production that improves mood and behaviour, strengthens the immune system, and increases energy levels. Meditation brings an alpha state into the brain, that aids and promotes healing, while making the mind fresh and beautiful."

Health Plus

According to research, meditation helps to activate the 'natural-killer cells' which kill bacteria and cancer cells. It reduces anxiety and stress, increases blood circulation and lowers blood pressure, improves concentration and sleep quality, helps in post-operative healing and cures chronic ailments like allergies and arthritis. "There is a lot already spoken about meditation and its co-relation to anxiety and depression. Besides that, there are



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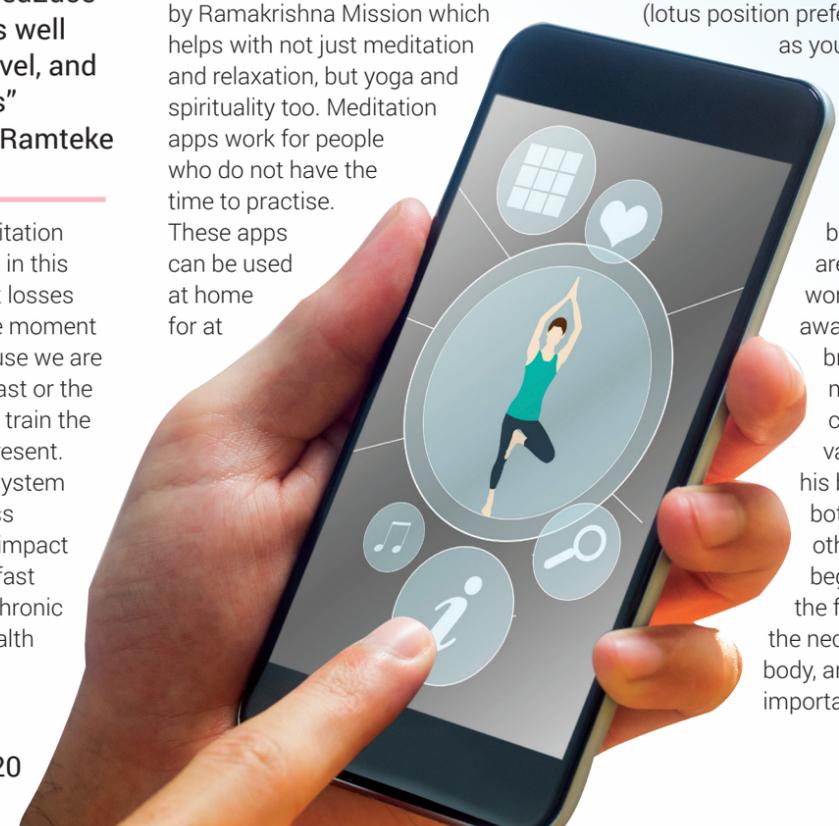
many more benefits of meditation such as being more present in this moment. One of the biggest losses we don't realise is losing the moment we have in front of us because we are constantly thinking of the past or the future. Regular practice can train the monkey mind to be in the present. It also relaxes the nervous system and regulates cortisol (stress hormone), that can directly impact the immune system, sleep, fast aging, and even lead us to chronic diseases," says Certified Health Coach Nipa Asharam.

App Fix

As with everything else now, you can also use apps to help you meditate, and integrate it into your daily life. Calm is a heavily-marketed mindfulness app that has a mix of spoken meditation sessions and calming music and nature sounds. Unlike other apps, you can also download meditations to listen to them offline. There are also dedicated sessions for children, as well as stretches to help relax your body.

Another app called Headspace has an animated feel, but with a calming effect; it starts you off with a personal 'get-to-know-you' quiz, but is fairly limited in its choice of responses. The app called Simple Habit denotes a simple way to inculcate meditation in our lives. It has a clean interface, with lots of options for sessions that are designed to suit most of your needs.

Smiling Mind is a personalised meditation app that can help you practise mindfulness in various sectors of your life. Indian meditation apps include Sattva meditations and mantras, Isha chants, Chakra meditation, Yoga Nidra, Let's meditate, and AOL- meditation among others. In addition, there is the Heartfulness App by Ramakrishna Mission which helps with not just meditation and relaxation, but yoga and spirituality too. Meditation apps work for people who do not have the time to practise. These apps can be used at home for at

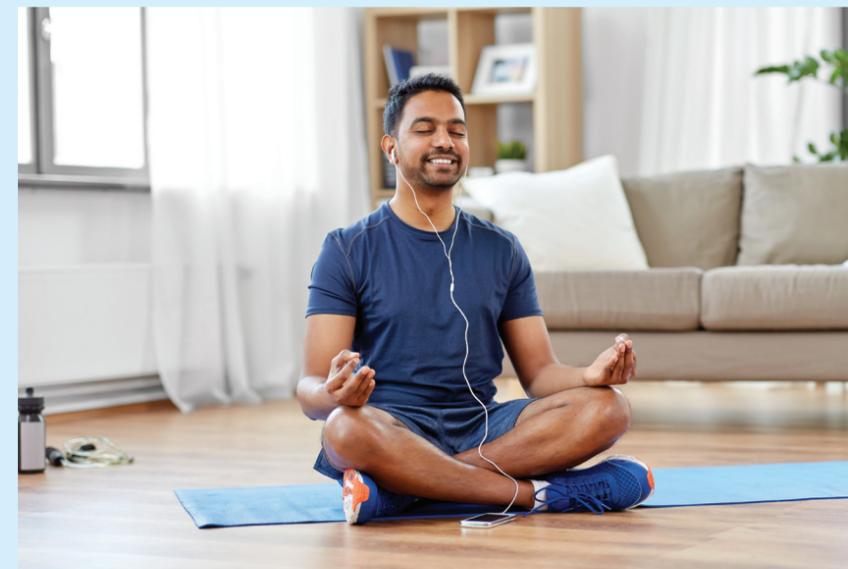


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least an hour at a time. These, however, are quick fixes that work temporarily. One can stay away from stress, and boost efficiency by practising meditation regularly. This positive addiction will have a long-term impact on your body, mind and emotions.

Vipassana

The retreats at Vipassana are for at least 10 days; they include 10 hours of daily meditation, completely cutting off the outside world. Vipassana follows the age-old technique of focussing on your breath by staying in one position (lotus position preferably) as long as you can to achieve concentration. Once the meditator has gained his concentration below his nostril area, he starts working on inner awareness of his breath. He starts moving his concentration to various parts of his body, from top to bottom, and then the other way around. It begins first through the face, followed by the neck, arms, upper body, and legs. It is very important to routinely



do at least one hour of meditation everyday to achieve the benefits. Also, one is not allowed to speak at all, so there is a period of complete silence in the person's life for 10 days.

Darshana Gupta, Freelance PR Consultant, meditation, yoga and dance enthusiast, and an avid solo traveler, says, "After going through two 10-day Vipassana meditation courses and now practising it regularly, I feel more in tune with nature. It helps to improve one's health by reducing stress levels, stay at peace, and be compassionate toward others. There is higher awareness, and getting angry is rare, since you are aware of what is happening, and you have the capability to switch."

Choose your Meditation

Tiesta Duggal, an internationally certified workshop leader and life coach, opines, "There are various meditative practices and spiritual ways to meditate, and numerous institutions and meditation centres coming up around the globe to help people develop a better connect with themselves. To start with, meditation can be as simple as taking a few minutes out of one's busy schedule and taking a few deep breaths to allow their minds to calm down and restore. Today, science has increasing proof about the benefits of meditation, as during the process

of meditation, one's brain lets go of the flight and fight mode, and moves from the preservation mode to the rest and digest mode -- leading to a more relaxed and peaceful state, stimulating gut health, and thus allowing the body to function in a restorative state.

"You can try different ways of meditating. Deep breathing 8-10 times, four times a day, or playing some meditative chants or mantras and trying to focus on one's breath. The frequency and vibration of the music help soothe the brain. Even spending time in nature and allowing one to process feelings, thoughts and emotions, or sitting down to write one's emotions and feelings, can count as meditation. You can also do pranayam and chant Om, practise guided meditations under a spiritual teacher, or practise gratitude each day by writing a few things you are grateful for. All of these are some ways to meditate."

Science of Meditation

It has been scientifically proved that meditation increases grey matter and even retain it as you grow older. It has also been scientifically proved to create more gamma brain waves (we usually create more alpha brain waves). Gamma brain waves are the ones associated with universal love, forgiveness, letting go, so on

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– Tiesta Duggal



and so forth. Monks create very high gamma waves, so our brain can be compared to theirs to see this clearly. Studies indicate that meditation has both, physical and mental impact. This includes resolving problems like irritable bowel syndrome, post-traumatic stress disorder, fibromyalgia, psoriasis, anxiety and even depression. There are some important aspects like depression, chronic pain and anxiety that are typically solved in any mindful meditation programme, with effects similar to other existing medical treatments. Speak to your doctor before replacing pharmacological treatments. Dr Shweta Gaonkar, Mercure Goa Devaaya Retreat, avers, "Meditation reduces the depression causing chemicals in the brain. The stress hormone named cortisol, and adrenaline levels, are reduced in the blood, which are factors of disturbed sleep and stress. People who meditate can produce more antibodies (immunity cells) than others. Meditation impacts neuronal plasticity and decreased activity of default mode network, and the activation of brain regions involved in cognitive and emotional control." Dr (HC) Shashi Kumar T. N., Founder of Nirvana Yoga Shala and Osho Glimpse, Mysore, says, "Backed by scientific research, meditative practices are known to be effective methods of relaxing. Regular meditation has shown to reduce anxiety attacks by lowering levels of blood lactate; prevent/reduce stress and stress-related muscle tension; lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels; boost the functioning of the immune system, manage chronic pain; increase exercise tolerance in heart patients, and even reverse heart disease.

### Tools and More

One can take the help of musical instruments, music per se, or other elements that can aid meditation. From creating a calm ambience with scented candles and crystals to playing soothing music, there are several options available.

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Tibetan bowls, candles, fragrances, music, beads, guided meditation apps and games, crystals and lights are some of the tools that aid meditation; also Buddhist Malas, also known as yoga beads, prayer beads that are used for counting breaths and Japa. Zen meditation music is specifically composed in order to promote relaxing brainwaves, and to calm the mind. Muse Meditation Assistant is a truly unique and wonderful mindfulness tool. It is modern and a little futuristic,

but definitely a good piece of meditation equipment to buy. Muse works as a personal assistant. When you put the muse headband on and start the app, it plays relaxing music, designed to calm the mind. You can then focus on those sounds. It measures whether you are calm or stressed, and uses that information to change the sounds it is playing. When calm, you hear more intense sounds, that remind you to relax. The Buddhist Gong is specifically designed to create frequencies that help us meditate, by entering the brain into a meditative state. Crystals are some of the most age-old and beautiful objects that help in meditation, and they all have different spiritual properties, so choose wisely.

### In Conclusion

Meditation has known to improve sleep patterns as well, and a recent India-wide study has indicated that people in their 60s could sleep as well as the people in the 40s. This goes to show that meditation can have a positive impact on physical as well as mental wellbeing. New age modern and fast lifestyles have a lot of stress and day-to-day tension that can be remedied with simple and active Meditation,



which can make anyone attain a meditative state. Walking, reading, cooking, bathing or even just watching your breath is a form of meditation. The art of extending awareness and breathing can create meditation within you. Meditation begins by being separate from the mind, by being a witness; and therein lies its true power. It not just relaxes and rejuvenates your mind but also helps you heal yourself. That is certainly reason for you to start meditating. After all, your health is in your hands, and meditation is the path to achieve it and more.

### Celeb Speak

**Sri Sri Ravi Shankar** – "Meditation is the art of doing nothing and letting go."

**Dalai Lama** – "If every eight-year-old in the world is taught meditation, we will eliminate violence from the world within one generation."

**Sadhguru** – "You cannot do meditation but you can become meditative. Meditation is a certain quality. It is not a certain act."

**Eva Mendes** – "Meditation really helps create not only a sense of balance... but serenity and kind of a calm state of mind."

**Ellen DeGeneres** – "It feels good. Kinda like when you have to shut your computer down, just sometimes when it goes crazy, you just shut it down and when you turn it on, it's okay again. That's what meditation is to me."

**Hugh Jackman** – "Meditation is all about the pursuit of nothingness. It's like the ultimate rest. It's better than the best sleep you've ever had. It's a quieting of the mind. It sharpens everything, especially your appreciation of your surroundings. It keeps life fresh."

**Deepika Padukone** – "I meditate."

## We bring you some of the best apps that help you meditate

**Calm:** One of the most popular of all meditation apps, Calm also has specific programmes to tackle issues like anxiety, lack of sleep, and stress. Available on the Apple Store.

**UnPlug:** This app has over 700 meditation videos, ranging from one minute to one hour. Many options of customisation are available, and sessions are filmed live. Available on Apple Store and Google Play.

**Headspace:** If you want to improve focus and get temporary relief from daily activities, Headspace can help. With quirky illustrations, there are also sessions that can help you sleep well through the night. Available on Apple Store and Google Play.

**10% Happier:** Like the New York Times best-selling book by the same name, this has a free version and a premium one that has a library of 500 plus guided meditation videos. Available on Apple Store and Google Play.

**Insight Timer:** This is an entirely free App that has over 30000 pre-recorded guided meditation sessions, an in-app progress keeper, and guided sessions led by well-known yogis and mental experts. Available on Apple Store and Google Play.

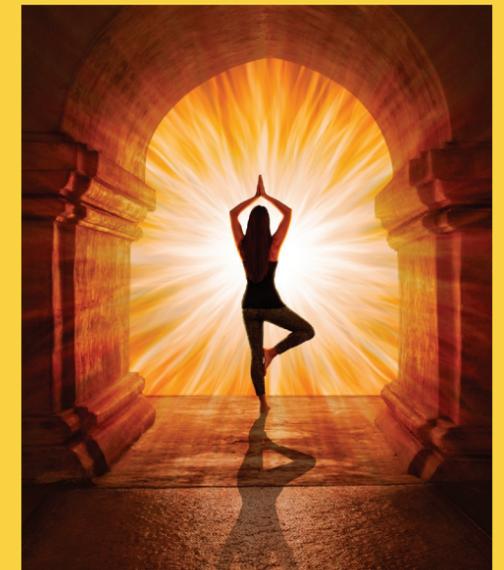
**Relax Now:** This app is a tool to help your body relax, as it has recordings from a certified hypnotherapist, David Ridgeway D. Hypn. This is a free app, and you have options that can energise or calm you, with a range of customised background music options. Available on Apple Store and Google Play.

**Pzizz:** An app that can primarily help users sleep, there is music, voiceovers and sound effects that can help you go to a Zen-like mode. If you are looking to get more work done, check out the focuscapes section as well as the cooldown section to get back into your space. Available on Apple Store and Google Play.

**The Mindfulness App:** If you are aware of the basics of meditation and are not looking for guided exercises, this app can help. You can also create a custommade session with flexible time periods. Available on Apple Store and Google Play.

**Aura:** If you are looking to self-reflect, based on the mood you are in, this is the app for you. You can track your meditation time, moods, and set reminders to practise mindfulness to improve your moods. Available on Apple Store and Google Play.

**Simple Habit:** Focussed on daily stress relief, this app has five-minute sessions that you can do on the go. There are motivational guides and bedtime stories also on the app. Available on Apple Store and Google Play.





I breathe out what I can't control and focus on the positives."

**Rajinikant** – "Meditation is the key to energy."

**Kinds of Meditation**

- Vipassana meditation
- Mindfulness meditation
- Sudharshan Kriya from AOL
- Transcendental meditation
- Shambhavi Mudra kriya by ISHA FOUNDATION
- Buddhist form of meditation
- ZEN form of meditation
- Chakra meditation

**Do it Right**

- Meditation is not about having no thoughts – so don't try to make that your objective; it is training the monkey mind to be present with what is in front of us.
- Meditation does not mean that you need to sit in one place. In fact, you need to be in a meditative experience through the day with whatever activity you are doing.

and then seeing its benefits in everyday life.

- Do not get anxious or start reacting when you are not able to focus on your breath. It happens a lot that while meditating for a certain time, you are unable to focus, as your mind is wandering, and your body gets restless. Just keep moving on by focussing on your breath, time and again.

**COVID-19 and Meditation**

In the current times of the COVID-19 pandemic, there could not be a better way to keep your sanity in check than through meditation. With social distancing and quarantining becoming the new norm, we live in a changed world, where things are completely different from what was normal earlier. And this is where you can keep your mental health in perfect condition by meditating. A simple way to do this is to close your eyes and calm your mind – do this anywhere and anytime. You can focus on your breath or on any object, and relax your mind. This is when you have much free time, so start with small steps and take charge of your life – you are bound to come out of this stronger and happier.



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