Start Your Day with MEDITATION
Too often we jolt awake, reach for our phones, and begin to mindlessly scroll. With just a few finger swipes, social media notifications, and urgent work emails, we’re thrown directly into whatever the new day has in store for us. But it doesn’t have to be that way. The morning is rich with opportunities to ease our bodies and minds into the day—and how that happens may look different for everyone. Movement, music, journaling, or (most likely the reason you’re reading this digital guide now) meditation.

Whether you’re new to meditation and hoping to make it a part of your daily life, or a regular who is aiming to get back into it, the early hours of the day can be a peaceful time for any kind of mindful practice. Bringing mindfulness to your morning isn’t always about sitting down and closing your eyes to meditate—sometimes dedicating a few moments to bringing your full attention to the sensations in your body or a seemingly mundane morning task is enough to ground yourself for the rest of the day. With our guide to morning meditation in hand, we hope that you’ll find moments in your mornings to tune in to your body and wake up your mind. Try setting an intention for the day with our practice from Parneet Pal, or simple meditations to gather your energy and tap into your senses from Sharon Salzberg and Cara Bradley.

Yes, some mornings will always be hectic, and often-times we can’t help but jump right into the day because of the commitments we’ve made at home or at work. But the truth is, it’s the times when we are busiest that we often need mindfulness the most.

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Morning Practices

4 Start Your Morning with Purpose
Your day-to-day activities offer ample opportunities to call up mindfulness in any moment. Breathe space into your morning routine with this simple wake-up practice.

5 Explore Your Senses
Take time to notice sights, sounds, tastes, sensations, smells, and thoughts first thing in the morning.

6 Gather Your Energy
Strengthen your ability to concentrate so you can empower yourself to stop wasting energy and attention.

7 Savor a Cup of Tea
You can build moments of mindfulness into the day through simple activities like brewing and enjoying a hot beverage.

8 Rest in the Flow of Experience
As soon as we are aware of thoughts and sensations arising in the moment, rather than getting caught in attempts to grasp them, a glimmer of space emerges.

Meditation Space

9 A Place of One’s Own
A firm intention and a personal touch make for a meditation spot you’ll want to visit often.
Start Your Morning with Purpose

By Parneet Pal

How often have you rushed out the door and into your day without even thinking about how you’d like things to go? Before you know it, something or someone has rubbed you the wrong way and you’ve reacted automatically with frustration, impatience, or rage—in other words, you’ve found yourself acting in a way you never intended.

Intention refers to the underlying motivation for everything we think, say, or do. From the brain’s perspective, when we act in unintended ways, there’s a disconnect between the faster, unconscious impulses of the lower brain centers and the slower, conscious, wiser abilities of the higher centers like the prefrontal cortex. Given that the unconscious brain is in charge of most of our decision-making and behaviors, this practice can help you align your conscious thinking with a primal emotional drive that the lower centers care about. Beyond safety, these include motivations like reward, connection, purpose, self-identity, and core values.

Setting an intention—keeping those primal motivations in mind—helps strengthen this connection between the lower and higher centers. Doing so can change your day, making it more likely that your words, actions and responses—especially during moments of difficulty—will be more mindful and compassionate. This practice is best done first thing in the morning, before checking your phone or email.

1. **Connect with your body.** On waking, sit (in your bed or a chair) in a relaxed posture. Close your eyes and connect with the sensations of your seated body. Make sure your spine is straight, but not rigid.

2. **Connect with your breath.** Take three long, deep, nourishing breaths—breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth. Then let your breath settle into its own rhythm, as you simply follow it in and out, noticing the rise and fall of your chest and belly as you breathe.

3. **Investigate your intention for the day.** Ask yourself: “What is my intention for today?” Use these prompts to help answer that question, as you think about the people and activities you will face. Ask yourself:
   - How might I show up today to have the best impact?
   - What quality of mind do I want to strengthen and develop?
   - What do I need to take better care of myself?
   - During difficult moments, how might I be more compassionate to others and myself?
   - How might I feel more connected and fulfilled?

4. **Set your intention for the day.** For example, “Today, I will be kind to myself; be patient with others; give generously; stay grounded; persevere; have fun; eat well,” or anything else you feel is important.

5. **Throughout the day, check in with yourself.** Pause, take a breath, and revisit your intention. Notice, as you become more and more conscious of your intentions for each day, how the quality of your communications, relationships, and mood shifts.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Parneet Pal is Parneet Pal, MBBS, MS, a consultant and coach training individuals and groups in “lifestyle as medicine,” using evidence-based approaches and innovative behavior change models. She is chief science officer of Wisdom Labs.
This mindfulness practice is about pointing our attention toward different senses: sight, sound, taste, touch, smell, and our thoughts.

Remember: It’s not about getting anything right or being perfect. If turning your attention toward what is happening in your body is too much, listen to your body and ease up. This is also relevant for the rest of our lives, as we walk through the world: in any situation we can tune in to the body and work with what we find there.

1. **Find a comfortable seat.** Place your feet on the floor, your hands on your thighs, and sit upright in an alert and comfortable way.

2. **Point your attention toward your physical sensations.** Notice how your feet feel on the floor. Notice where you feel your clothing. Notice if you feel any coolness or heat on your skin. Notice physical changes as you inhale, whether it be around your chest or your belly. Notice what happens when you exhale.

3. **Pay close attention to what’s happening in your body.** Notice any other physical sensations emerging, arising, or falling away. Coolness, heat, tingling, tension, or relaxation. Take a few moments now to scan your body. Notice what’s happening within.

4. **Next, turn your attention away from your body and toward your sense of sound.** Fine tune your attention to notice what’s happening way outside of your immediate surroundings. Then bring your awareness closer and notice the sound of your breath.

5. **Turn your attention toward your sense of smell.** What do you smell in your environment? Perhaps there is a lack of smell right now. Notice that as your mind starts to settle and your nervous system starts to steady, you start to shift into a more awake and aware state of being.

6. **Now, turn your attention to your sense of taste.** Notice if you taste anything, perhaps the remnants of your toothpaste or your coffee.

7. **Move your attention to your sense of sight.** Open your eyes for a moment, and notice what’s happening all around the room. Notice what’s happening way out beyond your immediate sight, such as the wide-open space, the sky, the trees, and the walls that are far from you. Notice your peripheral vision, what’s happening to your sides that you’re not really looking at but you sense is there. You’re expanding your capacity to see by focusing your attention on this sense.

8. **Close your eyes once more to finish up your practice.** As you close your eyes, notice your mind. Notice the thoughts that come and go. They could be big thoughts or little thoughts, happy thoughts, or not-so-happy thoughts. You don’t need to label them. You’re just noticing. Just as smells come and go, thoughts come and go. Just as goosebumps arise and dissipate, so do thoughts. In many ways our thoughts can be considered our sixth sense. As you move in and out of your day today, notice your six senses.
This foundational attention practice is designed to strengthen the force of concentration. If you consider how scattered, how distracted, how out of the moment we may ordinarily be, you can see the benefit of gathering our attention and our energy. All of that energy could be available to us but usually isn’t because we throw it away into distraction. We gather all of that attention and energy to become integrated, to have a center, to not be so fragmented and torn apart, to be empowered.

In this system, the breath we focus on is the normal flow of the in-and-out breath. We don’t try to make the breath deeper or different; we simply encounter it however it’s appearing, and however it’s changing.

1. **To begin, you can sit comfortably and relax.** You don’t have to feel self-conscious, as though you are about to do something special or weird. Just be at ease. It helps if your back can be straight, without being strained or overarched. You can close your eyes or not, however you feel comfortable. Notice where the feeling of the breath is most predominant—at the nostrils, at the chest, or at the abdomen. Rest your attention lightly, in just that area.

2. **See if you can feel just one breath, from the beginning through the middle, to the end.** If you’re with the breath at the nostrils, it may be tingling, vibration, warmth, coolness. If at the abdomen, it may be movement, pressure, stretching, release. You don’t have to name them, but feel them. It’s just one breath.

3. **Notice what arises.** And if images or sounds, emotions, sensations arise, but they’re not strong enough to actually take you away from the feeling of the breath, just let them flow on by. You don’t have to follow after them, you don’t have to attack them; you’re breathing. It’s like seeing a friend in a crowd—you don’t have to shove everyone else aside or make them go away, but your enthusiasm, your interest, is going toward your friend: “Oh, there’s my friend. There’s the breath.”

4. **Notice when you’re distracted.** When something arises—sensations, emotions, thoughts, whatever it might be—that’s strong enough to take your attention away from the feeling of the breath, or if you’ve fallen asleep, or if you get lost in some incredible fantasy, see if you can let go of the distraction and begin again, bringing your attention back to the breath. If you have to let go and begin again thousands of times, it’s fine, that’s the practice.

5. **You may notice the rhythm of your breath changing** in the course of this meditation session. You can just allow it to be however it is. Whatever arises, you can shepherd your attention back to the feeling of the breath.

6. **Remember that in letting go of distraction the important word is gentle.** We can gently let go, we can forgive ourselves for having wandered, and with great kindness to ourselves, we can begin again.

7. **When you feel ready, you can open your eyes.** See if you can bring this awareness of breath periodically into your day.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Sharon Salzberg is the New York Times best-selling author of *Real Happiness*, *Loving-Kindness*, and *Real Change* and cofounder of the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts.
Bringing mindfulness to simple activities like drinking tea trains us to direct attention consciously. We might think we choose what we’re paying attention to in life, but in reality most of us are driven by habit and impulse. By deliberately choosing to attend to an activity, we slow things down and let ourselves become aware of the process of attending and perhaps how little control we usually have over it. We might notice the repeated wandering of the mind as we attempt to stay with what’s happening right now.

We are learning to see what’s often obscured by distraction. By coming back repeatedly to the various aspects of tea-drinking, we are cultivating the capacity to focus. And because we’re practicing this with gentleness, without judging ourselves or striving to reach some goal (even the goal of becoming better at paying attention), we are simultaneously training in acceptance and compassion.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Ed Halliwell is a mindfulness teacher and writer, based in Sussex and London, UK. He is author of three books: *Into The Heart of Mindfulness*, *How To Live Well By Paying Attention* and (as coauthor) *The Mindful Manifesto*.

1. **Pay attention to the sound of the water heating and boiling in the kettle.** Hear its bubbling and gurgling. Can you see wisps of steam coming from the spout? Be open to your senses, rather than trying to analyze what’s happening.

2. **Notice the feeling of being in your environment:** your bottom’s contact with the chair or the floor, if you’re sitting down; the weight of your feet on the ground, if you’re standing.

3. **Pouring the tea, watch the color of the water change** as it meets the teabag. Be interested in the transformation from clear water to tea, and the tinkling of liquid as it fills the cup. When your mind wanders into thought, as it probably will, gently return your attention to sensing.

4. **Lifting the teabag out with a spoon, feel the touch of the handle against your fingers,** and the weight of the bag dropping away as you tip it into the bin. Notice any tendency to do this on autopilot, and come back to the present moment.

5. **If you take milk and sugar, be interested in how you feel as you reach for and add these ingredients to the brew.** Do you really want them? How do you know?

6. **Notice the warming of the cup that contains the hot liquid.** How do your hands feel as you hold it?

7. **Take a sip of tea.** Rather than gulping it down, see if you can let the taste tickle your tongue. Just be aware of your sensations and the liking or disliking of them. If there are thoughts, let them enter into and then pass through your mind without following them.

8. **When you decide to swallow the tea, notice how that decision is made.** Is it a conscious choice, or does it happen automatically? Stay present to the reflex movements in the back of the mouth and the throat, the trickle of liquid down into the stomach. How does it feel to be swallowing?

9. **Pause now, noticing any feelings of irritation.** Or perhaps a sense of peace or stillness enters you. If so, where do you feel it? Is it changing from moment to moment, or staying the same? Maybe there’s something else going on in your mind and body, perhaps unrelated to the tea-drinking, pulling you into thoughts of the past or the future. If so, just notice it.

10. **Return your attention to the cup of tea in your hand.** Return to step seven, and continue drinking the tea until the cup is empty, or you decide to stop drinking. If the latter, be curious about what is prompting that decision. Whatever you choose to do in each moment, try to watch the experience from an engaged observer’s perspective.

**Savor a Cup of Tea**

By Ed Halliwell
Being human is like flowing as a river—many moving droplets make up the stream. The river changes all the time, yet there is continuity as it follows well-worn grooves through the landscape. A river cannot suddenly shift its direction, just as we humans tend to follow a course set by past events and patterns. Yet, the more we become aware of how the flow occurs and the grooves are followed, the more we can relax into the ride. As we see more clearly, we also become more able to steer our way skillfully through the current. A good way to begin is to practice resting in the flow, as in this meditation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Ed Halliwell is a mindfulness teacher and writer, based in Sussex and London, UK. He is author of three books: Into The Heart of Mindfulness, How To Live Well By Paying Attention and (as coauthor) The Mindful Manifesto.

1. **Settle into a posture for sitting meditation,** feeling the connection of your body to the floor, cushion, or seat. At any time during this practice, especially if you feel disconnected or disembodied, come back to this sense of groundedness, anchoring your experience.

2. **Begin paying attention to breathing,** noticing how each breath—indeed, each moment of each breath—is a unique experience, not the same as the previous one or the next. Notice how the breath happens without you controlling it—your breath is happening within you; “you” are not choosing to breathe. Know, too, that all of the automatic processes of the body—oxygenation of the cells, blood flow, heartbeat, and so on—are happening in the same way. As best you can, relax into this experience.

3. **Open awareness now to the whole body.** As sensations rise into consciousness and pass through, recognize that they are all impermanent, continually transforming in intensity, location, and quality. Let them be experienced, moment by moment, and allow them to pass through, as best you can, without attachment or rejection. Recognize, too, that the physical constituents of your body are in flux: Skin is being shed, cells are growing and dying, some neural connections are strengthening, others are weakening.

4. **Now bring awareness to thoughts.** With a friendly interest, observe the patterns of thinking that are running through the mind, like clouds passing across the sky of the mind, making up its weather. Like the weather, these patterns are always changing, depending on atmospheric conditions. Realize that the thoughts you had a year ago, five years ago, a decade ago—each of which may have seemed extremely important back then—are now merely memories, and that thoughts appearing in the mind right now will share that fate.

5. **Finally, open up your mindfulness to every aspect of conscious experience**—sensations, sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and thoughts. Let go into the space within and around you, remaining alert and present to whatever comes. Allow the play of experience to happen by itself, resting in the flow, moment by moment. When you notice attention wandering to a particular place, acknowledge the wandering and open out to the whole panorama of experience once more.

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A firm intention and a personal touch make for a meditation spot you’ll want to visit often.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PERRY JACKSON • STYLING BY DEB NELSON

A nice meditation space isn’t about the square footage—it’s about atmosphere. A window, with its uplifting natural light, makes for a perfect anchor.
Imagine lying in bed, thinking about your day: back-to-back meetings this morning, helping to take your partner’s car for repair, a proposal to finish, and plans for dinner that you’re wondering if you should just cancel. You had hoped to fit in some exercise, but that’s probably not going to happen. You can feel your mind start to whirl.

Then imagine getting up and going to your meditation cushion. You drape a wrap across your shoulders, set your timer, and...sit.

You could do this practice right in bed, at your kitchen counter, anywhere really. But there’s something very purposeful and grounding about having a special place to meditate, a designated spot where you can take time to get your body and mind in sync. It might be a whole room dedicated to meditation and other mindful pursuits. It could be a corner in a multipurpose room. Even just a few elements that inspire you can help make any space right for your practice.

Our own internal poll reveals a few common themes when it comes to the ideal meditation space:

- **There’s a comfortable yet supportive place to sit.**
- **It’s neither too hot nor too cold.**
- **There’s a way to keep track of time.**
- **There is support for achy or stiff body parts.**
- **It’s well laid out—in other words, you feel good being in this space and ready to meditate.**

After that it’s really about personal taste. If candlelight makes you feel more settled, then by all means, use a candle to signal the start of your practice. Perhaps there are certain colors, aromas, or images that you particularly appreciate. Use whatever you need to make your meditation space a place you want to return to again and again—a welcoming retreat, if only for a few minutes, from the rest of your busy life.
Can’t afford to designate space in your home solely to meditation? No problem. If you have a decent and supportive chair, you’ve got what you need.
A Place to Start

Wherever you go, there you are. And wherever you are, there you can meditate. It doesn’t matter if you’re in your living room or sitting on a park bench or standing on a bus—the moment you settle your mind into meditation, your environment becomes your meditation space. So why all this talk of designating a special place in your home?

In order to cultivate mindfulness in our lives, we first have to set an intention and build a habit. Committing to meditate regularly isn’t easy. Life can feel overwhelmingly busy and distracting, and demands on our time and attention tend to spiral out of control fairly often. When it comes to sitting down with your mind, the only thing keeping you going is you.

Carving out a space in your home, even if it’s only a few square feet, means literally making space in your life for a regular meditation habit to thrive. You’re essentially giving your intention to meditate a home in the physical world. By setting an atmosphere that reflects your personality and welcomes you in, you’re simply giving yourself an encouraging nudge to keep it up.

But the space itself is only a starting point. Those moments spent meditating in your designated space lay the ground for your meditation habit to flourish, and with time that habit will help you to notice opportunities to extend your practice of mindfulness further. After all, the whole world is your meditation space.

What Do You Need?

ESSENTIALS
You, and something to sit on: Whether you use a cushion or a chair, your seat should provide proper support. And don’t shy away from extra support cushions and bolsters—when it comes to meditation, your body is priority number one.

ADD-ONS
Some things you don’t exactly need, but are mighty useful to have on hand: a timer, a glass of water, a cover-up (e.g., a sweater, shawl, or blanket) and socks.

ENVIRONMENT
Even if you don’t dress up your space at all, you’ll want to consider noise level, comfort, and temperature.
If you have an entire room to dedicate to meditation, set the tone with a few choice elements, like plants or a nice vase, but aim to keep it tidy and free from distraction.
Don't Get Too Attached

A meditation space is a helpful support, but it can also become a crutch. Once you’ve been practicing for a while, you might start to find that you don’t actually need a meditation space. All you really need is a body, mind, and breath. As soon as we dress up our meditation with candles, pretty pictures, and serene colors, we risk becoming overly attached to a particular feeling and meditating without that feeling can become even more of a burden.

More often than not, the word “meditation” is accompanied by images of sunsets, serene landscapes, and stacked rocks (seriously, Google it). But it’s one thing to appreciate beauty in the world, and it’s another to depend upon that beauty as your incentive to be in the moment. Mindfulness isn’t about drawing out and extending pleasant experiences, it’s about working directly and openly with the not-so-pleasant stuff of life. When life gets hectic our first response is often to push away or shut out our present-moment experience. Meditation allows us to cultivate equanimity and clarity for the times when we face the inevitable challenges of being human.

A comfortable meditation space is kind of like having a set of training wheels: It provides us steadiness and support to learn and hone our technique. It helps us to build confidence in our ability to work with whatever comes our way in life. Having that space to come back to helps to anchor our meditation practice. Unlike training wheels, the goal isn’t to move past needing a sitting space, but after a while you might notice that you no longer rely on that anchor—that you can meditate on the spot, wherever you happen to be. 🌞
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