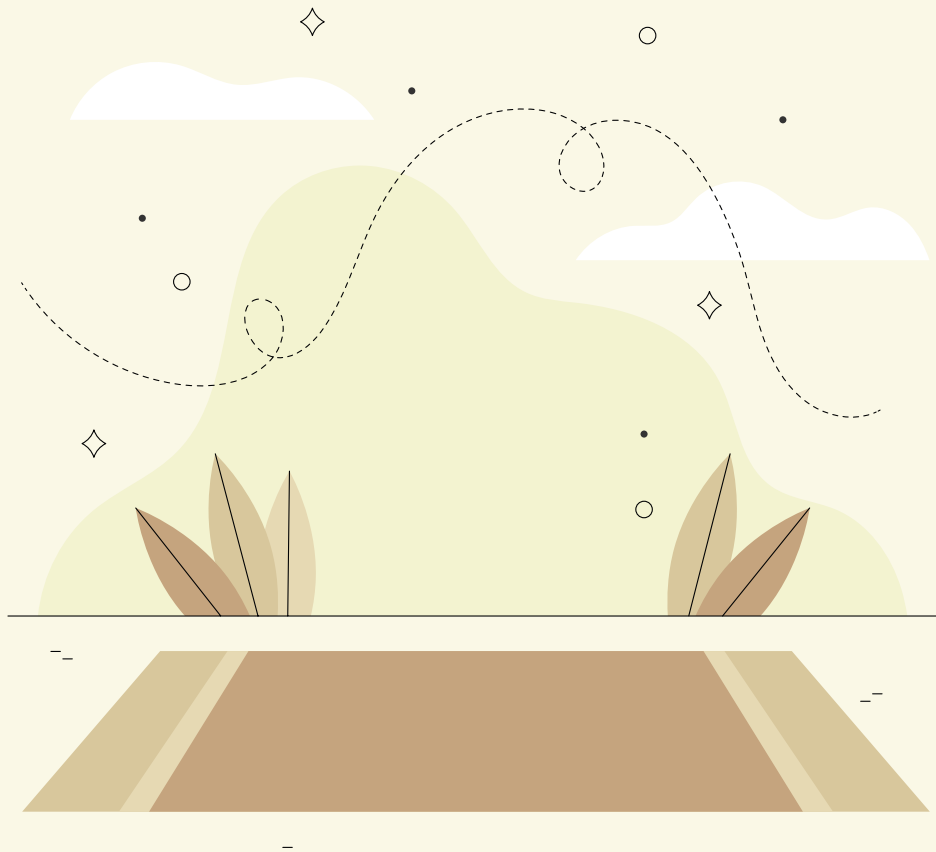


OFF  
THE RECORD

*A guide to*  
***MINDFULNESS  
& MEDITATION***



## Setting up a safe space

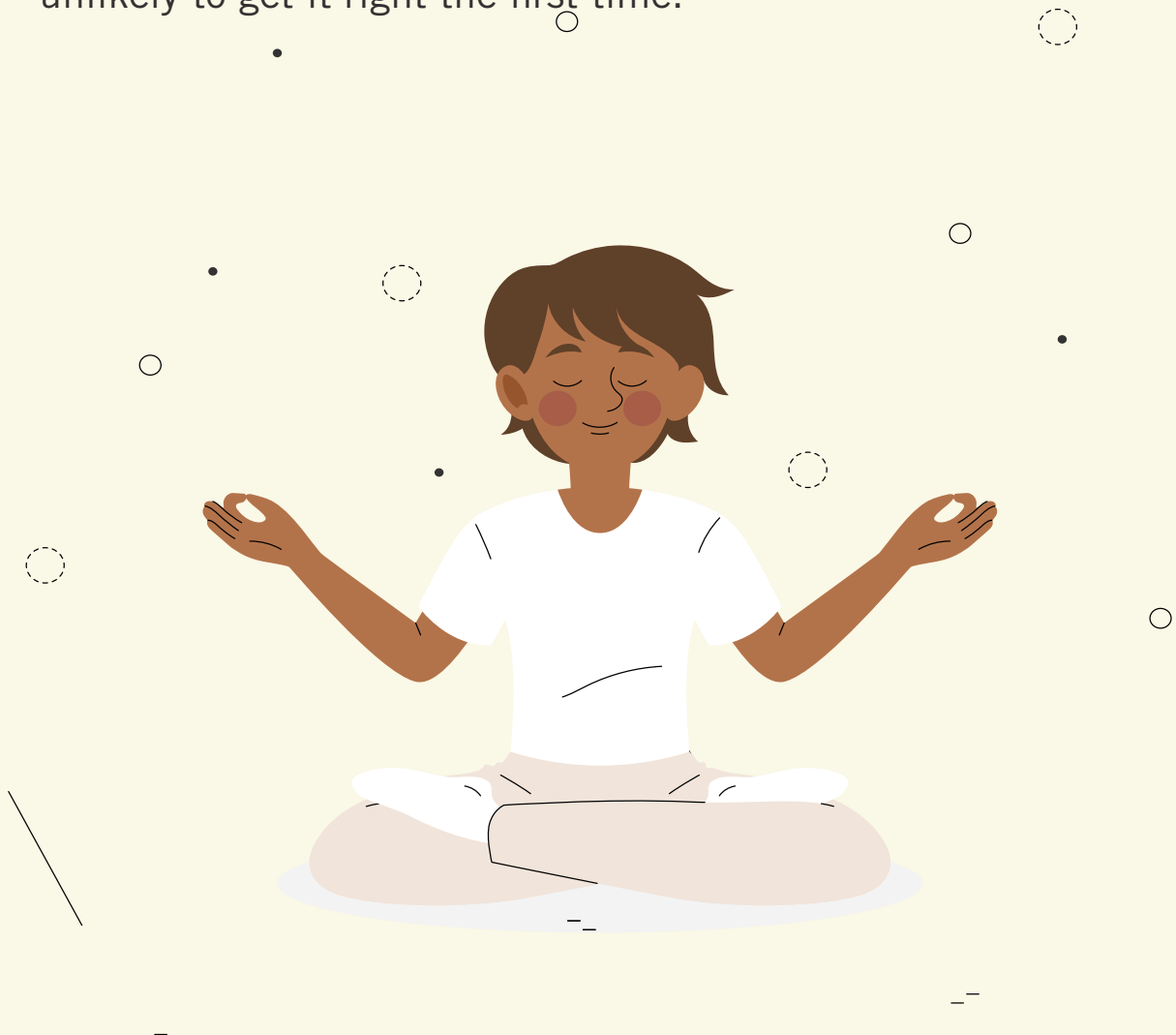
This is important for meditation. Find a space where you will not be disturbed for the amount of time you are going to do your practise. Ask members of your household if they can avoid disturbing you for this short while. If you are using your phone for a meditation sound file, try to set the ringtone to silent or busy or meeting.

If it is possible to make the place positive and calming in other ways, this will help too. You could have a photo or picture that makes you feel calm and positive, showing nature, an animal or flowers for example. A picture of your favourite person may not have the same effect, it might worry or excite you. Or you could light a candle if that is safe.

# Sit comfortably

Take some time in getting your posture comfortable and stable; not too upright, but not too slouchy. Try for your spine to be straight but relaxed. You can lean on something if that feels better for you, on a wall or the back of a chair, but for many it feels better not to lean back as the spine is straighter if it is free. Sitting on a chair is good, it helps you to sit upright. The thing is, you don't want the experience to be 'mindfulness of pain in the back!'

You can sit on the floor in a half lotus position if you are a yogi, but otherwise it's likely you won't be able to maintain the position without a great deal of effort. It can be good to sit astride a stack of 2-4 firm cushions kneeling on the floor, if you have a stack of firm cushions. Experiment, you are unlikely to get it right the first time.



## ○ Regularity

Meditation is not a first aid measure. What that means is that it isn't something you do just when you have a panic attack, feel angry or anxious or depressed. In fact, it is not good to try to meditate at those times, unless that is the time you always meditate anyway. Set a time, as well as a place, and try to meditate at the same time there each day, even if it is a very short meditation. Some people feel more awake in the morning, some feel more relaxed (but it's best not to be sleepy) in the evenings. Afternoons might be your best time.

When the time you have chosen comes, meditate whether you feel good, bad or something in between. What you are aiming to do is to bring your spectrum of feelings and awareness generally to a more positive place, to feel calmer, more grounded and more aware. You will always experience some ups and downs in response to positive and negative events in your life, but meditation and mindfulness helps you to meet these events from a calmer, more positive and more grounded perspective.

## **Don't shop around for different practises too often**

Try to find a meditation sound file you like and stick with it (There will be some suggestions later in this text), at least for a few weeks. What you are doing is trying to establish a positive habit. As your mind hears the first words of a sound file. It will kind of think "Oh, I know what we are about to do" and be more likely to settle into the practise more quickly as time goes by. The place and posture being the same or similar will also help to create a positive habit. That doesn't mean you can never change for a new practise though, just try to avoid changing too often.

# Preparation

When you sit down to your mindfulness/meditation practise, start by having an intention to just focus on the practise for the short while you are there. See it as a way that you are taking care of yourself, a nice time to spend with yourself. Don't make it into another 'should'.

Find a comfortable posture. Look at the pleasant thing in front of you if you have placed one there.

Allow your mind to settle down, and become aware of any physical sensations, emotions, thoughts or feelings that are around in the present moment. There is a big difference between being caught up in thoughts and being aware of what you are thinking, as if watching it from the outside. Bring your mind gently to the focus of the practise.

Close your eyes if you are comfortable doing so. This is the best way of screening out some major distractions. If you don't want to close your eyes, you can have your gaze lowered to look at a piece of floor or carpet just in front of you.

# The Mindfulness/Meditation Practice itself

The mind is a wild thing! Don't expect it to be quiet. You might get some really still moments from time to time, but this is not the usual. Think of the mind during mindfulness/meditation as needing a sheep dog to keep it in line. Your effort is the sheep dog. The mind wanders to the future, you bring it back.

It wanders to the past, you bring it back, you think of a person who annoys you. You remember a person you like. You get hungry. You get uncomfortable. You plan your shopping. You think of who you are going to message, what you are going to say. You plan all sorts of things, remembers all sorts of things, get annoyed, get excited, get bored, get restless, get uncomfortable. Each time, when you realise, however long that takes, you gently and kindly bring your mind back.

## Types of attention

There isn't just one type of attention with which we can focus on our breath or whatever. There is impatient attention, harsh attention, overly heady, concentrated attention, irritated attention and so on. What we are aiming for in mindfulness and meditation is a gently, kindly, curious and interested attention. That there is some warmth, kindness and space in our attitude to ourselves and the practise. We are kindly guiding out attention to learn a new skill, to focus and rest gentle on what we guide it towards. We are also aiming at a balanced effort, which means we don't try too hard and we don't just let our mind drift, but find a middle way between those extremes.

# Well-known obstacles

There are some well-known obstacles in meditation, there are five of them:

**Restlessness and anxiety:** it's just what it says, not being able to settle. If you experience this, it can help to focus on your out-breath, or on the lower part of your body, such as the sensations in your feet

**Sleepiness:** If you feel sleepy it can help to focus on the in breath, or sensations around the face or head.

**Desire:** This can be about physical contact, food, drink etc., any kind of sense experience. With all kinds of obstacles, it is good to notice it, name it and return gently and kindly to the focus of your practice.

**Animosity:** This is about irritation, anger, even hatred. As you settle, what or who annoys you may come to mind. Again, notice and name this, and try to bring a kindness to yourself and your focus.

**Doubt:** Is perhaps the big one. It is the thought that come to your mind saying; "what on earth am I doing sitting here focussing on my breath? I could be doing more constructive things! What is the use? It's not going to work anyway." Well, again, bring your attentions gently and kindly back to the focus. From time to time, you will hopefully know that how you feel has changed.



## How do I know it is working?

You know it is working, not from how good your practise is (although hopefully you come to enjoy this time more and more), but from how you are in the rest of your life. Even if your practise is not that enjoyable, or you don't seem to be able to focus that well, have things changed? When you have practised for a few weeks, have you become less reactive when someone says something you don't agree with? Are you more comfortable in yourself? Do you feel more relaxed generally? When you get anxious, is it not quite as anxious as you used to get? Is it a bit easier to relate to, and talk to people? Do you feel a bit happier in yourself? The proof of the pudding is in the eating. You need to give it some time and regularity for change to happen, and it's a good practise of self-care for the rest of your life, not just for when you are struggling. But you will also need to see improvements. If you have practised over a long period and nothing improves, then why would you carry on?



# A structure to start Mindfulness/Meditation

A good way to start your practise is here: [www.uclahealth.org/marc/mindful-meditations](http://www.uclahealth.org/marc/mindful-meditations)

This is the University of California's Mindfulness Research Centre. On this page you will find 9 sound files of mindfulness/meditation exercises in English (and some in Spanish).

A suggested practise would be doing these two sets of meditations:  
*Body Scan Meditation (3 minutes) followed by Breathing Meditation (5 minutes)*

And alternate this with:

*Body Scan Meditation (3 minutes) followed by Loving Kindness Meditation (9 minutes)*

So you will be sitting for 8 minutes on one occasion and 12 minutes on the following occasion. It is always good to start any kind of meditation with an awareness of the body. It will ground you and bring you into the present. Noticing your breath will develop your ability to be present in a calm way, and developing positive emotions through the loving kindness meditation gives a warm flavour to that presence. These two aspects balance each other, like the two wings of a bird.

If you can do one of these sets in the morning and one in the evening, all the better. But you can also do one the one day, and the other set the next day. If you miss a day or two, just start from where you were.

There are other meditations on the list that might interest you also. If you have trouble sleeping, the last meditation on the 'English' list; Body Scan for Sleep' can be played while you are lying down trying to get to sleep at night, if getting to sleep is difficult for you.

After a few months, you can choose one or two longer meditations from this selection: [www.freemindfulness.org/download](http://www.freemindfulness.org/download)

Or you can just continue with the same set you have been doing.

Wishing you success and good health in your life and that these instructions benefits you.

