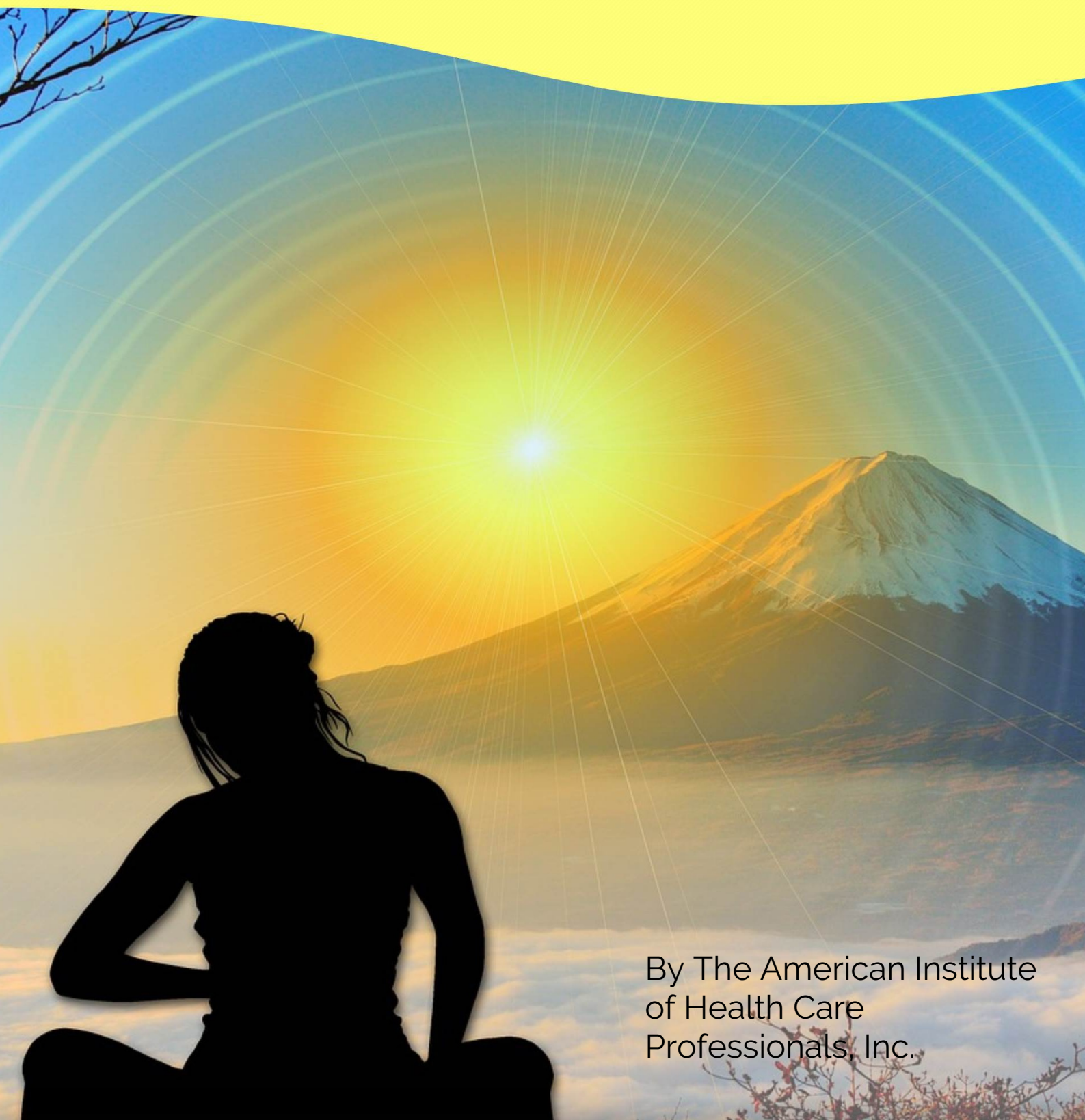



The Art and Science Of
MEDITATION
To Boost Focus And Concentration



By The American Institute
of Health Care
Professionals, Inc.

Table Of Content

Information	1
The Different Types Of Meditation	2
The Benefits of Meditation	5
Understanding Why Meditation Works	7
Learning to Focus Through Meditation	8
How to Meditate for Improved Focus and Concentration	10
Final Thoughts	13



Information

In the same way you workout to strengthen your body and make it fit and healthy, meditation is a way to strengthen and tone your mind. By practicing regularly, you can change the way your brain operates, create new pathways for thinking, and learn new ways of thinking that can help you in many aspects of your life. Meditation is an excellent way to improve your focus and concentration, as well as become more in tune with your own thoughts and feelings.

Contrary to how many people think about meditation, it is not actually just one activity. There are many different types of activities that are meditative, and you can engage in meditation in many different ones. Each meditation practice requires different mental skills, and becoming good at these requires practice and patience, just like when learning other skills.



The Different Types Of Meditation

There are many different types, or purposes, for meditation. As an ancient practice, meditation has been a foundation for many of the world's great religions and schools of thought, including Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism. It has been practiced, in some form or another, since around 1500 BC, according to some historians.



While ancient practices were mainly focused on religious worship, modern meditation practices center on spiritual growth as well as self-improvement, relaxation, and stress reduction. Today, the practices of meditation have become intertwined with those of yoga, especially the many varieties of Hatha yoga practiced in Western cultures today.

There are many reasons people choose to meditate, and depending on your purpose, you may opt for a specific meditation technique to help you. The most common forms of meditation practice today include concentration meditation, mindfulness meditation, and spiritual meditation, although these may go by different names depending on who is describing them.

Below is a brief description of each to help you differentiate between the various purposes or forms of meditation.

Focused-Attention or Concentration Meditation

Focused-attention meditation is practiced to help you develop your ability to concentrate. During this practice, you focus on a single point, sometimes referred to as an anchor. Your anchor could be a mantra, a candle flame, an object, listening to a repetitive sound, or counting beads, such as on a mala.



every time you notice your mind wandering during this type of meditation, you should refocus your awareness on the anchor. This allows you to let go of the random thoughts that can seep into your consciousness, and by focusing fully on one thing for a sustained period, you develop your powers of concentration and focus.

Focused meditation is the antithesis of modern multi-tasking, and a skill many of our brains are seriously lacking. By focusing your entire attention on one single thing, you can learn to become aware of the distractions that vie for your attention and learn to push them away on command. By committing to this type of practice, you are developing your ability to concentrate, which can lead to better relationships, the ability to silence your inner critic, and a more focused approach to anything in your life.

Mindfulness or Open Monitoring Meditation

Building upon the skills you learn in focused meditation; mindfulness meditation takes your practice a step farther. Mindfulness practice teaches you the skill of observation over judgment. When engaging in mindfulness meditation practice, you observe your thoughts as they wander, but you do not follow them, nor do you place judgment on them.

Open monitoring, another name for mindfulness meditation, helps you develop the ability to achieve a more Zen state of mind, as you allow the thoughts that preoccupy our minds to drift in and out without giving them any credence or ability to control your mind. This practice can help you recognize how your thoughts and feelings affect you, how your mind works in patterns, and how to break unhealthy cycles that lead to unhappiness.

Mindfulness meditation helps you achieve an inner balance that requires practice to obtain. The method is based on Buddhist teachings and can teach you how your mind works, which can serve as a foundation for self-actualization. This practice provides you with habits of mind that promote better satisfaction, patience, tolerance, and other habits of mind that lead to a more balanced, happier, life.

Mindfulness meditation combines the practice of concentration with that of awareness. To achieve success with this practice, you must be honest with yourself. This practice can be effective in reducing depression, anxiety, and stress. Mindfulness helps you build resilience, which can help you deal with difficult situations while still maintaining peace of mind.

Spiritual Meditation

Meditation has been used as a part of spiritual practice in many religions for centuries. In modern society, many religious and spiritual traditions are including meditation as a part of prayer and worship. Those who use meditation as a part of their religious practice do so to support their connection with the higher power that guides their beliefs.

In the case of non-theistic beliefs, meditation becomes a path to self-actualization and awareness. So, regardless of your beliefs, meditation can help you achieve your spiritual and personal goals, allowing you to become the person you want to be.

When using spiritual meditation, you are able to connect with and develop the qualities you seek to improve within yourself. Spiritual meditation can be looked at as a form of self-reflection, allowing you to worship in your preferred location as you seek spiritual growth

Other Forms of Meditation

There are many other forms and purposes for meditation, practiced around the world. These also may go by different names, but the goals are somewhat universal. Other styles of meditation include visualization, movement, chanting, effortless presence, and loving kindness or Metta meditation. Each is selected for a purpose and many involve specific techniques.

The Benefits of Meditation

Meditation has been practiced for so long because of its many clear benefits. Even when the aim of meditative practice is not relaxation, most who engage in meditation feel more relaxed afterward. By learning to focus and let go of intruding thoughts, as well as how to be more aware of your emotions and responses, meditation can involuntarily cause a reduction in how your body responds to everyday input.



Other short-term physical benefits that have been noted by researchers include a reduction in blood pressure, lowered heart rates, slowing of respiration, and improved circulation. The mental and emotional benefits are also evident in the research, including lowered anxiety, decreased levels of cortisol, a better sense of well-being, reduced stress, improvements in memory and cognition, and better relaxation (The Effects of Mindfulness Meditation: A Meta-Analysis, Eberth, et al.).

The longer and more consistently you practice, the more long-term your results will be, but after a while, you will soon realize that the goal of meditation is not to achieve any of the results but merely to be present.

While not the aim, the physical, mental, and emotional benefits of meditation are causing more people to turn to it as an alternative therapy for many disorders, including mental health problems, stress-related illnesses, and even those who suffer from chronic pain or insomnia. Practitioners are beginning to recommend meditation as a therapeutic tool for patients, and the broader understanding and embrace of meditation has grown significantly over the past four decades.

The Effects of Meditation on Neural Development and Cognition

In addition to the many health and wellness benefits meditation has on your body, regular meditation also fundamentally changes your brain, including having a positive improvement in concentration and focus. Because mindfulness meditation is all about focus, these daily exercises can lead to improvements in three specific areas related to attention.

1. Executive control - The functions included in executive control skills include the ability to inhibit distracting information consciously. By learning to ignore these distracting thoughts, you are better able to focus and maintain concentration on the task or moment at hand (Attention regulation and monitoring in meditation, Lutz, et al.).

2. Sustained attention - The skills related to sustained attention encompass your ability to remain vigilant while completing a task. This includes the ability to handle unexpected events, the ability to complete tasks faster, and ease at which you are able to maintain focus (Cognitive Aging and Long-Term Maintenance of Attentional Improvements Following Meditation Training, Zanesco, et al.).

3. Selective attention - This aspect of concentration and attention include selecting the relevant input or information to which to pay attention. This aspect of focus is crucial in modern society, as we are consistently provided with new stimulus all the time.

Because meditation can improve all three of these essential aspects of focus and concentration, it represents an excellent tool for cultivating your ability to focus.

Understanding Why Meditation Works

Meditation's power lies in its ability to engage many different types of brain waves, helping us to reach different centers of our brains that could use some practice and work to strengthen them. Meditation can teach you to consciously work your way from higher frequencies of brain waves to purposefully activate lower wavelengths.

The benefit of slower wavelengths is you have more time for each thought, which gives you more of a chance to determine if the thought is worth investing yourself in as well as how to respond.



A team of Australian and Norwegian researchers has identified the brainwaves most affected by meditation and how meditation impacts our ability to engage various brain waves.

The gamma state, which is when your brain waves are between 30 and 100 Hz, is a state of hyperactivity which enables active learning. This state is excellent for helping retain information, but in a sustained state can lead to anxiety in some.

The next time of brain wave is the beta state, which is from 13 to 30 Hz. You usually operate for most of your day in this alert state. This state allows for thinking and working when you are analyzing, categorizing, and assessing.

Alpha state, between nine and thirteen Hz, is a more grounded, balanced state when your mind can relax. This state is often achieved after pleasurable or relaxing activities and could be described as lucid and reflective.

Not until you reach the theta state, which ranges between four and eight Hz, are you able to begin meditation. In this state, you are able to transition from verbal thinking to a more visual mind. Your awareness increases, your intuition becomes stronger, and you have more capacity for problem-solving. You are able to visualize in this state.

Delta state, between one and three Hz, is rarely reached by those who are awake, except perhaps for Tibetan monks with years of meditative experience. This state is usually reserved for dreamless sleep.

One way to consider how mediation supports focus is because of the increase in your ability to concentrate using both hemispheres of your brain, allowing for better overall performance.

As you practice meditation regularly and consistently, you learn the ability to slow your brain waves and enter a more meditative state when needed.

Learning to Focus Through Meditation

It is hard to ignore the importance of focus and concentration. While focus can certainly benefit you matters like education and financial success, it can also have a profound impact on other aspects of your life. Modern life is full of sensory overload, and the ability to move past these distractions to attend to what is truly important to you. Without focus, it is difficult to stay tuned to your beliefs and need.



According to research published in the *Journal of Physiological Science*, and research on Buddhist monks confirm that meditation can help you develop skills of focus and attention, even during tedious tasks that could otherwise cause failure. Let's look at why having improved focus is a skill we should all learn.

Increased Ability to Attend to One Thing

Increased focus allows you to concentrate on a single aspect, goal, or event in your life. This can allow you to accomplish more goals you have in life and dedicate more time to those things you believe to be important in your life.

Goal Setting

The focus you gain through meditation can enhance your ability to know yourself and understand what goals will help you best achieve happiness. Clear focus can help you identify all that is most important to you, which helps shape your vision and set goals that will get you where you want to be. Setting the right goals is the key to achieving your desired results.

Resilience

When you begin to and continue to practice focus on a specific goal, you are more likely to try many different strategies in the name of achieving that goal, and to persist in the face of difficulty. When you learn to focus, you are able to consider alternative methods or new strategies that will help you overcome failure or obstacles, increasing your chances of success.

Stress Reduction

Learning to focus through meditation provides you with the opportunity to focus on the positive aspects of your life, which help lower your stress and reduce symptoms associated with excess stress. When you are working on your own self-development and healing, the focus and concentration you learn through meditative practice can provide needed support, too.

Confidence

When you meditate regularly, you begin to know and trust yourself more. Through the self-awareness that often accompanies meditation, you learn to feel confident in your abilities as well as recognize your own power to build new strengths and skills.

How to Meditate for Improved Focus and Concentration

Focused meditation involves the selection of a point of focus, sometimes called an anchor, and attention to that anchor in exclusion of everything else that may be competing for attention. When opting for focused-attention meditation, you select something that you can focus on with your senses.

This could be a sound, a chant, your own breathing, a burning candle, or just about anything else that is useful for you.



When you opt to focus on this one thing, you can quieten your mind and feel at peace in the quiet between your busy, distracted thoughts.

Especially when learning to meditate, you need to understand that it will be difficult for you to maintain attention for very long periods. You will become distracted, you will have to learn how to refocus your attention, and it will take time. Stay calm and work toward bringing yourself back to your anchor, recognizing that this may take several attempts. Do not judge yourself or become frustrated. It takes time and practice, and it is not something you will learn overnight.

Focused meditation can teach you many things and help you develop your mind, but it is also relaxing and helps you center yourself. By anchoring yourself in the present moment, you can let go of anxieties and worry, free yourself from judgment, and focus on yourself for a short time.

Setting the Stage for Focused-Attention Meditation

Start by setting yourself up for success in your selection of an environment that is conducive to this type of practice. A quiet room with a comfortable place to sit is needed, especially in the beginning. Select somewhere you will be free from distractions for the duration of your practice. Sit in a chair or on the floor, but make sure your back is straight and your feet rest on the floor. Make sure your clothes are loose and not binding and take off your shoes if this makes you more comfortable.

Start your practice with just a few moments of relaxation. Close your eyes and breathe deeply and slowly, filling your abdomen with air. You should soon notice your muscles beginning to relax, especially those in your shoulders, neck, head, and face. Spend as long as you need to get into this relaxed state before focusing on your anchor. Focus on your breathing.

Selecting an Anchor

What you choose to concentrate on during your focused-attention meditation is a personal choice. When starting out, you may try several different types of anchors before selecting just one, as you may not know what will work best for you until you practice with it several times. The following are just some of the options you can select as an anchor for this type of meditation.

1. **Your Breath.** Breath focus means you breathe normally and naturally, all the while focusing on each inhale and exhale. You should feel the air as it enters through your nose, focus on the expansion of your chest, lungs, and abdomen as they fill with air, and concentrate on the air leaving your body through your nose. Become totally immersed in your breathing process, allowing yourself to focus on this act and this alone.
2. **An Image.** Select an image that is pleasant or neutral for you. You could opt for a lit candle flame, a favorite landscape, a flower, or just about anything you like. Visualize the image in your head, allowing the details to come gently to your mind. Focus your full attention on this image. Include all the details you can see, hear, taste, feel, or smell in your mind. Get to know the object by observing everything you possibly can about it.
3. **A Mantra or Word.** You can opt for a word that has positive connotations for you, anything that makes you feel good, or you can go with a mantra such as “om,” a traditional chant for meditation. Repeat the mantra with each breath, saying it either quietly in your head or out loud, as you choose.
4. **A Real Object.** Like with an image, select something that makes you feel positive. If you enjoy outdoor meditation, this is a good option, as you can focus on the sunset, a nearby landmark, the sound of water, or the sun on your face. You can keep your eyes open if you prefer to have the constant visual, and again, you will focus on all the details that make this object special and unique.

Next Steps in Focused-Attention Meditation

Your anchor should be the focus of your attention, which keeps you concentrating on the present moment. You focus on your chosen anchor, ignoring all other input, distracting thoughts, and images that come to your mind.

When other images, feelings, and thoughts come to you, as they will, notice that you have lost focus, then gently remind yourself to return your concentration back to your anchor. Avoid feelings of frustration or anger, instead just acknowledging these other thoughts or feelings and allowing them to drift on past you. There should be no judgment about these distractions, instead just acknowledgment and a recommitment to focus on your anchor.

When you begin practicing, you will likely find it difficult to sustain your attention for longer than perhaps five or ten minutes. Over time, you will work up to a more lengthy practice, aiming for 20-30 minutes as an optimal period in which to meditate. After you are finished, sit quietly, keeping your eyes closed, for a few minutes, coming back to your usual thought patterns and re-engaging all parts of your mind before proceeding with your day.



In the beginning, especially, it may be helpful to write down your experiences with meditation, including any insights you have about your practice. You may have nothing to write about, or you may find you have much to consider.

Even if you become distracted many times, your meditation session was successful. Letting those thoughts drift past means you are benefiting from this practice, and you should have patience in the process it takes to develop these types of skills.

Once you have practiced and feel comfortable and confident in your focused-attention meditation, you may want to embark on learning open monitoring meditation practices, which take what you learn in focused-attention to the next level. Open monitoring builds on these learned attention skills to incorporate more skills of observation as well as how to stop passing judgment on every thought that crosses your mind.

Final Thoughts

It is worth remembering that the practice of meditation is the benefit of meditation. All over outcomes are side effects of the practice, but some of these are so significant that they have become the focus of the conversation around meditation in recent decades. We do know, from imaging, interviews, empirical research, and anecdotal accounts, that meditation has an overwhelmingly positive impact on those who practice it regularly.

Meditation, at its core, teaches you how to silence your mind. When you can do this, your concentration increases, and you experience inner peace despite the craziness and chaos of your outside world. This inner peace is what has allowed meditation to continue as a lasting, trusted practice across so many cultures and religions for thousands of years.

In recent years, meditation has gained mainstream popularity and recognition. If you have been wanting to try meditation but have been hesitant, perhaps this guide will give you the understanding and confidence you need to engage in this ancient and powerful practice.

As you practice and gain confidence, your reasons for meditating may shift over time. The wonderful thing about meditation is it is easily customizable to each person, and over time, your practice will grow and change with you, as you and your needs evolve.

Meditation practice began as a path to transformation and enlightenment, and this goal should not be overlooked, despite the impressive list of positive side effects this practice boasts. Self-actualization is perhaps the most important outcome of meditation, and while this is difficult to measure and evaluate through scientific research, it is nonetheless an important outcome that should not be overlooked.



Thank You

Please visit us at

www.AIHCP.net