

# 9 simple ways to make meditation a daily habit

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I've always been an anxious guy. When presented with new information, my mind will construct all kinds of elaborate worst-case scenarios, then replay them on loop until I shut down my brain through distraction, sleep, or—more often than not—beer. I've been in and out of therapy for years, and until recently was taking a SSRI for generalized anxiety.

About a year ago, I discovered Headspace. I was initially skeptical but figured anything that could help combat my constant swirl of fear and worry was worth a try.

Fast forward one year later: I've managed to meditate with Headspace for 365 consecutive days. I've tapered off the meds, reduced my number of my therapy sessions, and am at least somewhat better at pulling myself out of self-destructive tailspins. I'm certainly not free from anxiety, but I am better equipped to deal with it.

Like any habit, the tough part is sticking with it. If you're looking to make meditation a daily habit, here are some tips that might help.

## Choose a realistic amount of time

I used to think meditating meant sitting for hours in silence. But I discovered I was more likely to stick with it when I chose a short, realistic goal. I picked 20 minutes. Some days I only did 10 minutes, but I never put any pressure on myself to do more than 20.

## Do it in the morning

This may not be true for everyone, but morning is when I have the most control over my time. It also put me in the right frame of mind going into my day.

If morning just isn't convenient for you, I'd recommend choosing a specific time you have free every day—your lunch break, for instance. You might switch it up sometimes, but having meditation regularly built into your daily schedule helps a lot.

## Do it anywhere and everywhere

Unlike exercising your body, you don't get sweaty exercising your mind. So you can do it in your normal clothes, wherever you happen to be, and move on to the rest of your day. Here's a list of some of the places I trained my mind in the last year:

- on a chair in my apartment
- on a city bus
- standing up on a crowded subway train
- on a park bench
- on several airplanes
- in hotel rooms in four countries
- in the Amtrak quiet car (the best!)

- hiding in the stairwell at work
- hiding in the bathroom during a party
- waiting at the DMV

I once assumed I needed a quiet place to meditate. But I found I could practice anywhere the noise was consistent—meaning there might be some noise, but because it didn't change, I could tune it out.

One Sunday morning, I was meditating across the street from a preacher giving a loud sermon over a megaphone. My initial response was to tense up and think, “This is ruining my meditation!” But then I realized the megaphone made his voice muffled—like the adult voices in Charlie Brown cartoons. Once I accepted that the voice was part of my environment, I was able to tune it out and go on with my practice. However, if people are having audible conversations around you, maybe try somewhere else.

## Keep the streak going

This was the number one factor in maintaining my daily habit. Once I committed to meditating every day, I didn't want to break my streak. Headspace has little badges that mark your progress: 1 Day, 3 Days, 10 Days, 15 Days, 30 Days, 90 Days, 180 Days, 365 Days. For me, this was a hugely powerful motivator. After each session, I'd check my streak number. This became a positive feedback loop. I'd meditate, check my streak number, and take a little pride in moving forward. The streak is your friend.

## Scale back when you need to

Some days, I couldn't do my full 20-minute session. It happened when I was traveling, or sick, or just didn't have the energy. On those days, I'd do a mini session. I'd meditate for about half my normal length, just doing the basics: deep breaths, checking in with the senses and the body and following the rhythm of my breath.

A big part of combatting anxiety is being kind to yourself, so it doesn't pay to beat yourself up if you can't stick to a perfect schedule all the time. Just do a little bit, enough to keep your streak going, and pick it back up tomorrow. I recommend using the Unguided 10 Minutes session for these days.)

## Accept that you won't be perfect

If your brain is half as self-critical as mine, your first thought will be, “I'm terrible at this. My mind's just not built for meditation.” But that's kind of the point. Meditation is practice. It's training. And when you're training, it's ok to mess up.

There's a meditation technique called Noting. If your mind wanders off, you're supposed to pause, note what distracted you, and let it go. When I first tried this, every time I caught myself getting distracted, I got angry. “Crap! I'm distracted!” I'd think, “I suck at meditation!” But realizing you're distracted is the point. So every time you mess up, you're actually moving forward.

I used to juggle, and one of my juggling teachers said, “If you're not dropping, you're not learning.” That's the gist.

## Make it about others

It's easy to imagine meditation as very self-focused. But by taking care of my own mind, I've become more likely to treat others well. Developing skills like acceptance, patience, and empathy, are qualities that will benefit the people you care about. So if you don't feel motivated to meditate for yourself, remember that doing it could help those around you.

## Remember it's not magic

Meditation is a wonderful thing, but it's not a silver bullet. I still sometimes experienced anxiety, stress, and sadness; occasionally I'll find myself in a negativity spiral and think, "This isn't fair! I'm meditating every day!" (You can see I still have some room for improvement.)

[Article by Chris Plehal, <https://www.headspace.com/blog/2016/01/11/sticking-9-ways-make-meditation-daily-habit/>]