

MEDITATION Q&A + Disclaimers

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS MEDITATION?

Mindfulness is a nonjudgmental awareness of the present moment. *Meditation is a tool to practice mindfulness* and help us foster these qualities.

Most of our suffering in life comes from wanting things to be different than they are. We get caught up in ruminating about the past, or anxiety over the future. Most of us don't know how to be present—here and now. Mindfulness happens in the present moment, and so meditation is a tool to practice being present.

We simply sit down with an intention to be wherever we are. *We accept whatever is happening, without trying to change it.* We are open to feeling the good, and the bad. When we practice this each day, we become more okay with things happening—whether we like them or not.

It's really very simple, but you'll probably find that "simple" doesn't mean it's "easy." When we sit down to meditate at first, our thoughts can feel like they never stop. This is okay and completely normal! If you are human, this will happen. Meditation is a way to practice accepting whatever is happening with an open heart and mind.

WHAT IS THE POINT OF MEDITATING? DOES IT LOWER MY STRESS?

Meditation can absolutely help lower stress and relieve anxiety—as mentioned, anxiety is typically being lost in a thought about the future. If we can bring ourselves back to "now," we won't experience so much anxiety. Anxiety can cause us a lot of stress, which can be damaging to our physical, mental, and emotional health.

The point of meditation is not specifically for stress-relief, though—although it will provide that! *The point of meditation is to learn how to be more okay right now, with whatever is happening.* This increases not only our physical health, but our emotional and mental health, too!

Meditation is also a tool to practice self-compassion and change our negative self-talk. When we sit down to meditate, we usually focus on the breath, or some other sensation as an anchor. When our mind wanders away, we just take on the attitude of "no big deal" and bring the attention back to the breath. We can notice our tone—do we beat ourselves up for being "bad" at meditating? Or can we just be kind to ourselves and say "you're human! Just begin again. No big deal!"

IS MEDITATION RELIGIOUS?

Mindfulness meditation stems from ancient Buddhist traditions, but meditation exists in contemplative practices all over the world from many different cultures—both religious and secular. Meditation is a mental and emotional tool.

It is not a spiritual practice, although some may argue that getting in touch with your mental and emotional self can invoke your own spirituality—this is up to you! Whether you partake in any religion or other contemplative practices or not, *meditation can be a tool for anyone who wants to rewrite negative habits, lower suffering and anxiety, and find more peace.*

IS MEDITATION SAFE? IS THERE ANYONE IT ISN'T SUITABLE FOR?

Mindfulness meditation is safe and suitable for most groups, without adverse effects. However, if you're currently struggling with or exploring severe psychological trauma, please consult a mindfulness-based psychologist before beginning a meditation program.

When we meditate, we let our bodies and minds get very still and quiet, when usually we are very active. When we set into this stillness, there's an opportunity for emotions and experiences that we have not let ourselves feel or process to come up. This is normal and healthy—but there may be events you need to process with a professional either before meditation, or in conjunction with it.

For most people, meditation can be quite therapeutic in and of itself, and it's shown to reduce depression and anxiety for those reasons. *But for anyone struggling with trauma, specifically with PTSD, consult a mental health professional first.*

