



Mindfulness and Meditation

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How Mindfulness and Meditation
intersect, work together, and
differ

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Introduction

It's easy to confuse mindfulness with meditation or vice versa. The reason for this lies in the many definitions for both practices as well as the way they often intersect.

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Mindfulness

Mindfulness is about being aware, noticing what is occurring at the present time and experiencing the sensory world as it occurs. It teaches you to focus your attention and to live within a moment to moment awareness.

Though Mindfulness is a heightened state of awareness and is often practiced in conjunction with meditation, the two are not interchangeable. Mindfulness is more than just meditating. It's viewed in a much greater context.

Practicing Mindfulness is a way of living and being in the world. Mindfulness teaches you how to interact in a positive way, how to live in the moment and how to enjoy life to its fullest.

Mindfulness influences how you behave in relationships, how you concentrate and function at your job, how you react to adversity and stress, your decision-making skills, your interactions, your speech and so much more.



To become mindful, we must become aware. Without awareness, there is no mindfulness.

Moreover, unlike most meditation techniques, you are encouraged to practice Mindfulness during everyday tasks and functions, such as eating, driving, and walking.

Mindfulness is a technique that asks you to stay in the present moment. Living in the past or trying to foresee what lies ahead in your future are places where Mindfulness does not want you to dwell.

Living in the present, experiencing each moment fully and staying in touch with your everyday life and moments is what practicing Mindfulness is all about.



Some people believe that Mindfulness is another type of meditation. It is similar but you are not actually meditating per se. You are more becoming aware of each and every thing that is happening in your life, focusing on the present and awakening your senses to enjoy the present moments fully.

With that in mind, let's take a look at other forms of meditation. We are going to call this Mindfulness vs. _____ so that when you look at each topic, you can compare for yourself how the various methods compare and vary from one another.



“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

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Meditation

Meditation has been around since before recorded history, possibly since Homo sapiens evolved. The various practices originated from different disciplines, and were originally closely tied to religious teachings, beliefs and practices.

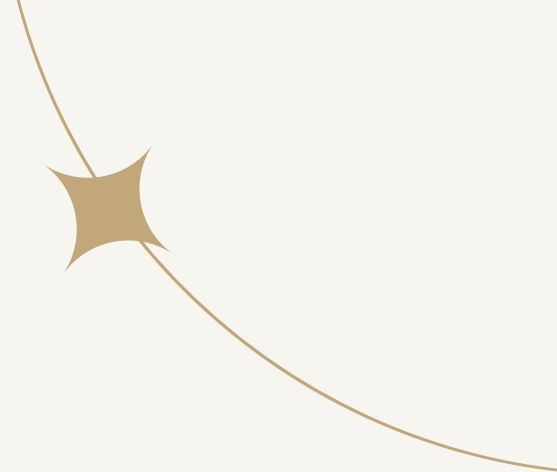
Because of this, meditation has grown and evolved in many different ways, making it difficult to define without distinguishing the different approaches. Various categories and techniques of meditation are practiced and experienced in a variety of ways.

Buddhist, Chinese, and Hindu cultures are some of the originators of what is now modern meditation, and there are important distinctions within these cultural types of meditation even now.

There are numerous types and styles of meditation. These different techniques affect and engage your brain differently and therefore, produce dissimilar results and varying levels of relaxation.

There are hundreds of different meditative disciplines, but these are some of the most popular and well-known meditative practices in the United States:

- Qigong
- Taoist
- Chakra
- Third Eye
- Sound
- Visualization
- Zen (Zazen)
- Mantra
- Mindfulness
- Transcendental



There are also categories for meditation, and each of these different approaches in meditation actually result in their own EEG patterns:

- Controlled focus – concentrating on your breathing, an emotion, object or sound and requiring the greatest amount of cognitive control. This concentrative approach is associated with Zen, Qigong and Tibetan Buddhism meditation techniques. Practicing controlled focus meditation reflects highly controlled or focused mental activity in the practitioner’s brainwaves through Gamma waves.
- Open monitoring – being aware and mindful of your thoughts and sensations without judgment or reaction. This contemplative approach is associated with Mindfulness meditation, Soto Zen, Kriya Yoga and Vedic (Sahaja Yoga) techniques. EEG brain wave patterns during open monitoring are predominantly in the Theta frequency with the frontal brain waves indicative of internal focus and memory tasks.
- Automatic self-transcending – transcending/going beyond thought and achieving pure consciousness and requiring no cognitive control. This is associated with Transcendental meditation. EEG monitoring during automatic self-transcending meditation reflects frontal alpha coherence, indicating increased inner awareness and a more peaceful mind.

Unlike Mindfulness, meditation typically cannot be performed while engaging in other activities. However, there are some disciplines that contradict this premise and encourage practitioners to meditate at any time.

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How Mindfulness and Meditation Work Together

Mindfulness
Meditation is one
type of Meditation.

It's easy to confuse Mindfulness with meditation or vice versa. The reason for this lies in the many definitions for both “activities” as well as the way both practices often intersect.

In fact, as mentioned in the previous section, Mindfulness Meditation is a type of meditation and falls into one of the three main categories as open monitoring. Mindful Meditation is one of the original religious meditative practices, arising nearly 50,000 years ago. The other major religious meditative practice arising at that time was Mantra.

Mindful Meditation is closely identified with Vipassana, the Theravadan Buddhist meditative practice. Vipassana means clear seeing or insight and is also referred to as Insight Meditation.



Though categorized as open monitoring, Mindful Meditation shares some similarities with controlled focus meditation. The practitioner usually focuses on your thoughts or on bodily stimuli, such as your breathing or sensations in and upon parts of your body and as a whole. However, the focus isn't completely concentrated, as you must also be aware of outside stimuli.

Central to Mindful Meditation is observance and awareness without judgment or emotional involvement. You are merely an observer.

Mindfulness is an overall approach to how you live your life, whereas Mindful Meditation is one of the tools you use to live a mindful life. Mindful Meditation helps you practice being mindful with controlled or guided exercises.

Through this practice, you become more skilled at being mindful in your daily life. You learn to ignore distractions and focus on experiencing the here and now. You become skilled at gently guiding yourself away from stray thoughts and back to what you are actually doing at the time.

You learn to disassociate from negative feelings that your thoughts can foster and become kinder and more understanding of yourself and others.

All of these lessons and skills are taught and learned through the practice of Mindful Meditation.



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Transcendental Meditation

At first glance, these two forms of meditation appear to be diametrically opposed. Mindful Meditation grounds you and makes you pay attention to everything you can feel, smell, see, touch or hear.

Transcendental Meditation (TM) asks that you drift off into an altered state of consciousness with no focus or mental ability.

During Mindful Meditation, you are in a state of waking consciousness, which is unlike the dream or sleep states. With TM, you achieve a state of transcendental consciousness, which is beyond sleep, dreaming or waking consciousness.

Your mind is alert, but restful. The TM experience should be effortless and spontaneous and is assisted with the use of a mantra. A mantra is a meaningless sound that facilitates quiet mental activity and deep relaxation through its harmonizing effect on your body and mind.

Mindful Meditation can be difficult to master initially. It may feel sort of unnatural, in that it requires you to feel and experience rather than think and dwell. It also asks that you remove any judgment from your feelings and experiences by way of your thoughts. This is extremely difficult for most people.


However, Mindful Meditation is not really that different from TM in this area. Instead of viewing Mindful Meditation as forcing yourself to notice and be aware, gently remind yourself to experience all stimuli.

When thoughts intrude, you don't "force" them out. You simply observe them, accept them and guide yourself back to your meditative state with no judgment or guilt.

While Mindful Meditation and TM are clearly two very different approaches, the effects are not dissimilar. Both meditations allow you to achieve calm and relaxation and provide holistic benefits for the mind and body.

The alpha gamma rays heightened by TM are associated with heightened attention and focus, which translates into a higher IQ, advanced learning ability, increased neurological efficiency and more developed moral reasoning.

Mindful Meditation produces a myriad of benefits, but the relaxation level is far lower than that of TM.



Transcendental Meditation has been shown to produce the following physiological results:

- lowered breath rate
- decreased cortisol
- reduced basal skin conductance
- reduced plasma lactate
- decreased activation of the sympathetic nervous system
- increased EEG coherence

Benefits:

- relaxation
- reduced anxiety
- reduced depression
- helps normalize blood pressure
- stress reduction
- improved cardiovascular health
- stimulates creativity and intelligence

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Concentration Meditation

Most methods of meditation place at least some emphasis on concentration. These techniques help you remain focused and overcome distractions during meditation. To help you enter into a meditative state, you will select something to focus on. The most common choice initially, is your breathing.

You concentrate on the flow of your breathing, the slow in and out of your breaths and the rise and fall of your diaphragm or abdomen. This single-minded focus is meant to exclude the distractions of stray thoughts and outside stimuli, allowing you to enter into a meditative state.

Many disciplines use a mantra as a focus of concentration. You may also choose an image or a something of symbolic spiritual significance. Other common objects are the flame of a candle, beads on a rosary or a repetitive gong.

Many hold the belief that concentration and Mindfulness are diametrically opposed in meditation. Concentration forces the mind to behave in a certain way, and to remain focused on a single thing, while Mindful Meditation employs a gentler approach, allowing you to observe distractions giving no one thing more emphasis or focus than another





There is another school of thought that teaches that Buddha differentiates Concentration from Right Concentration. Essentially, when viewed in this manner, with concentration you focus on your object, sound, or breathing. But you also practice Mindfulness to observe the object of your concentration as well as any other stimuli that encroaches. In this manner, concentration and Mindfulness actually work together during concentration meditation.



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Awareness and Meditation

With awareness in meditation, you have no main focal point. Instead you remain aware of all that happens around you. You remain neutral as you watch thoughts, feelings, memories, physical sensations and experiences pass by. Simply notice them and allow them to move on. Sound familiar?

Clearly, awareness and Mindful Meditation are intimately related. But though very close, they are not identical. They do, however, complement one another. You need awareness in order to practice Mindful Meditation.

While practicing Mindful Meditation, you may be distracted momentarily by a memory. This memory brings you agitation. Recognizing that the memory is intruding on your meditation and that it evokes agitated feelings is awareness. If you are very relaxed and experiencing no negative or distressful feeling and reactions, knowing and acknowledging this is also awareness.

You must understand that recognizing and identifying these feelings, memories and emotions is not the same thing as identifying with them by categorizing or judging them as negative or positive. That action moves beyond awareness. Whereas, awareness really is nothing more than noticing and being aware. Awareness allows you to “get out of your head” and just notice everything.

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Visualization


Visualization is based off the premise that the mind and the body are connected in such a way that guided thoughts can impact the body. You visualize your goals and focus on all aspects of them to make them manifest in reality.

Visualization is also known as creative visualization and guided imagery. It's used to address, treat or cope with many issues and problems, such as chronic pain, emotional disorders, obesity, smoking, stress, anxiety, and trauma.

Visualization is typically accompanied with relaxation techniques. In this way, it mimics some aspects of meditation and a very few traits of Mindfulness. You start with gentle breathing and concentrate on physical relaxation throughout your body. Once you are able, you move on to visualizing the goal you aspire to reach through your five senses.

Most people find it easiest to actually visualize their goal or dream in their mind's eye. However, you should also try to use touch, sound, smell and even taste to fully immerse yourself in your vision.





Imagine you are using visualization as a tool for relaxation and reduced anxiety. You might choose imagery of a destination that evokes happy, soothing thoughts and feelings, such as the ocean. You picture yourself at a beach, watching the tide come in and listening to the waves crashing into the shore, smelling the salt from the sea and tasting it on your tongue. You imagine dipping your toe into the water and feeling the chill of the ocean and the bubbling fizz of the surf. In this way, you are immersed in your imagery with all of your senses.

Visualization can be viewed as a type of meditation. You use concentration and focus for your visual image. You seek relaxation and you pursue a meditative state in order to connect with your subconscious mind to achieve your goal.



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Zen Meditation

Zen is of Buddhist origin. Zen meditation is arguably one of the best known types of meditation in the United States. It's also known as Zazen, where za means sitting and zen refers to meditation. Therefore, posture is an important component of Zen meditation. Many people are familiar with lotus position. You will typically perform this meditation seated on a cushion.

Zen incorporates elements of both concentration or controlled focus and open monitoring. You typically begin by focusing on your breathing, but you employ features of mindlessness as well. Zen meditation encourages the flow of thoughts through your consciousness as you meditate.

Zen and Mindful Meditation are often used interchangeably. However, Zen is much broader in its practice of awareness. Though you allow all thoughts and memories to pass through your mind, you are encouraged to not think at all during Zen meditation.

Zen reflects a spiritual awakening by experiencing all of life's stimuli moment by moment. However, you need not believe in any particular dogma, spirituality or religion in order to successfully practice Zen. You need only focus on the practice, the act of Zen meditation.

Recovery is an
inside job.

That doesn't
mean you
have to do it
alone.



If you would like to learn more about mindfulness or meditation and the roles they can play in Mindful Recovery, please visit www.johnnamauro.com.

You can find additional resources on the site, ways to work together, information on Mindful Recovery, details on how to get in touch and more.

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