

## Mindfulness and Meditation



In the workplace, mindfulness practices are known to improve employees' abilities to absorb, process and recall information. Preliminary studies suggest that mindfulness programs can also increase productivity and reduce the number of sick days employees take. For some people, mindfulness can be achieved through the practice of meditation.

People have been practicing meditation for centuries. Mentions of it are found in writings for all the world's major religions, with the oldest going back to 1700 B.C. Secular

versions have been popular since the 1960s and have become fairly mainstream. Today, meditation is used by people to:

- Decrease stress and anxiety
- Lose weight
- Decrease blood pressure
- Increase happiness and contentment

The words "mindfulness" and "meditation" are sometimes used interchangeably, but there's a difference. Mindfulness is a **state** of awareness; meditation is a **practice** or training of the mind toward that awareness, concentration or compassion.

### Benefits of meditation

Meditation leaders interviewed by *Entrepreneur Magazine* offered these tips:

- **End habitual unproductive thoughts:** We tend to dwell on frustrations such as an annoying coworker, a large workload or a difficult presentation. These negative thoughts can become habits that distract us and affect our relationships. Meditation helps us become familiar with and break these thought patterns.
- **Focus on who we want to be:** Noticing the thought patterns that come up during meditation makes us aware of habits and allows us to choose which ones to keep or let go. This awareness helps us set intentions on the impact we want to make with our lives and the values or qualities we want to cultivate. The values we choose will be evident in the products, companies, and cultures that we create.

Researchers at the Wellness Institute at Cleveland Clinic found that mindfulness-based techniques, including meditation, can lower stress levels in a demanding work environment and lead to happier, more engaged employees. Participants of a yearlong stress reduction program reported:

- A 31 percent decrease in stress levels
- A 28 percent increase in vitality, a measure of how energized a person feels throughout the workday

And, in a study by the University of Washington Seattle, human resource workers who had an eight-week mindfulness meditation training course were more focused and less negative toward work than a trial group who participated in an eight-week relaxation training course.

### How to begin a meditation practice at work

**Get help:** Create an internal team that can advocate for meditation at work. Find people who already practice it and can encourage their teammates by adding legitimacy. The team can help develop ideas on what could work for your company.

**Offer opportunities:** Try offering company-sponsored classes that include meditation. There are several corporate training programs with different methods, so use your team to review them before rolling one out companywide.

Set up a designated space for employees and encourage them to use it for a few minutes at a time throughout the day when they need a reset or focus.

**Educate your staff:** Don't assume your employees are knowledgeable about meditation and its positive effects on their health, mind and productivity. Introduce it at meetings or through company newsletters and emails. Let them know how your company will support them. Give them examples of positive meditation experiences and emphasize how it can help them personally *and* professionally.

**Practice at the office:** Short meditations can be done just about anywhere — in the office, cubicle, meeting room, etc. If you decide to hire a trainer, he or she will probably set up weekly or bi-weekly sessions that last 10 to 30 minutes. After about eight weeks of instructor-led meditation, most people are ready to continue on their own. You can continue with employee-led sessions or download a guided meditation app to share with your team. Or, you can encourage employees to use a meditation app at their desks or in a meditation space.

Sources: [entrepreneur.com](http://entrepreneur.com)\*, [mindfulnessremedy.com](http://mindfulnessremedy.com)\*, [clevelandclinic.org](http://clevelandclinic.org)\*, [huffingtonpost.com](http://huffingtonpost.com)\*, [mindworks.org](http://mindworks.org)\*, [forbes.com](http://forbes.com)\*

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