

## **Cultivating Healing Through Meditation**

(Taken from a Presentation on Meditation, Cancer Support Group)

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### **What is meditation?**

- Meditation is a strategy for integration of mind and body.
- It is a **practice**, not a philosophy.
- It is a natural human process, a restful, relaxed state.
- Meditation practice is intentionally attending to those restful, relaxed states.
- It is about **being** rather than **doing** or **becoming**.
- It is **awareness** rather than thinking or thought.

### **Four kinds of meditation**

All of them

- emphasize “being,” and can balance our usual goal-oriented activities,
- are a matter of releasing tension and thoughts to find the peace and pleasure available to us now,
- are about the experience of the present, not about any beliefs or ideas,
- include some tools to help our minds return to the present,
- are always available just by remembering to use the tool

#### **1) Breath meditation (simple--but not easy):**

Breath-related meditation: Our breath is an ever-present tool to remind us to focus (for now) on what is immediate and concrete. As we return to our breath we can release thoughts and feelings and those interesting stories our minds are so good at creating.

Posture: Sit comfortably in a way that takes a minimum amount of muscle strength so you can release tension. A straight back helps to open your lungs for deeper breathing. Laying down works fine, but can be harder to stay awake – which is sometimes OK too.

Focus: As you breathe you might find the tip of your nose is a little warmer when you exhale, and a little cooler when you inhale. Bring your attention to the tip of your nose between your nostrils can be your point of focus. Count each exhale, holding the number in mind as your breath releases, oooooonnnnnneeeeeee, ttttwwwwwooooo, up to ten, then beginning again at one.

The numbers help us notice when our mind wanders. If you try this, most likely there will be times when will find you are not counting at all – don’t waste a thought about it, just start again at one. There may also be times when you find you’ve reached 212; again, don’t waste thought, just start again at one.

## **2) Mindfulness meditation:**

Mindfulness meditations are wonderfully gentle and easy to bring to any circumstances. We all have distractions that exist only in our minds that distract us from our lives, friends, and families. Mindfulness techniques are tools to bring us back to the sensations and circumstances always surrounding us.

An always-available mindfulness exercise is that of just listening. As we walk or drive from place to place, instead of worrying about what may come in the future, or regretting something from the past, if we let our focus rest on the sounds that reach our ears we can take those moments as mental vacations. It actually requires no effort; sound comes to our ears of its own accord – all we have to do is remember to allow it into our awareness.

Walking meditation can be a similar mindfulness exercise. Instead of hurrying to where we are going, we can again rest in the walking itself, using only as much attention to the path as necessary to allow us to make the right turns to get us there. To walk mindfully, release thoughts of where you are walking from and to, and instead let your focus rest on the feel of the ground under your feet, and the sights and sounds you encounter on the way.

## **3) Guided Imagery and creative visualizations:**

Guided imagery can be a very effective way to calm the mind and body and refocus the attention. It is usually helpful to begin a guided imagery session with progressive relaxation, followed by the chosen images or scenes. The images chosen can be very personalized, can include animals, beautiful scenes, spiritual entities, or anything pleasing or restful. As a general guideline, choosing images which illicit feelings of love, joy and peacefulness, will be most relaxing and meditative. Cancer patients often use creative visualizations to focus body attention to enhancing immune function and shrinking tumors, as well as overall sense of wellbeing.

## **4) Body/movement meditation:**

There are a number of meditative body and movement forms that can take our focus away from the distractions of our mind and bring both moments of relaxation and physical release of tension and exercise. These forms are particularly helpful at times when our thoughts are so persistent or self-critical that the quieter forms of meditation seem to be shouted down.

A few examples are yoga, tai chi, and qi gong. Each can be adapted for any limitations due to muscle strains or physical limitations. Introductions to these forms are difficult with words alone, but many libraries have VHS tapes and DVDs that will give a better sense of what they offer. Particularly when beginner, it is also helpful to take a class so an instructor can offer suggestions that can help with the forms.