

## MEDITATION

The benefits of meditation range from relaxation to faster healing, lower blood pressure, enhanced immune functioning, and greater self-confidence. Many people are overwhelmed by the thought of sitting still for long periods of time, so don't limit yourself to "traditional" seated methods. Find what works for you. Some people enter meditative states while running or knitting; others would find their mind far from calm in those situations. A good indication of what might be meditative for you is an activity where you lose track of time, where you're so fully absorbed in the activity that thoughts and distractions just fall away.

### Creating the Space

Creating space for meditation can be literal, carving out a room, or even a corner of a room to practice. It may also be literal, meaning carving time out of your schedule for meditation. In either case, comfort and ease will go a long way toward building a practice that you can maintain and even enjoy.

### Seated and Standing Meditation

- ❖ Breath meditation – breathe in and out through the nose, watching the breath and observing the sensations
- ❖ Guided visualization – there are many CDs and DVDs of guided meditation; libraries often carry them
- ❖ Color meditation – visualize colors as a bubble around you – red, then pink, orange, yellow, green, turquoise, indigo, violet, silver, gold, white, brown, and black; notice how each feels, any emotions that arise.

### Activity-Based Meditation

- ❖ Qi gong and T'ai chi – slow motion movement
- ❖ Mandalas – geometric shapes to color (noticing smells, textures, sounds, feelings of colors) or just observe
- ❖ Yoga – find a sequence you can do without thinking

### Walking Meditation

Bring awareness to your body: to your feet, your legs, your clothing, the temperature of your skin. Breathe in and out through the nose with the mouth closed, allowing your belly to move with the breath. Begin to walk, letting the heel strike the ground first, and notice the sensations in your body as the weight shifts from the heel to the full foot, and the ball of the foot, then notice the sensations of the foot leaving the ground and the weight shifting to the other foot. Notice the feeling in your sacrum, your belly, spine, arms and shoulders. Notice the feelings in your neck, the angle of your head. Allow your jaw to relax and your gaze to soften. Notice the fluctuations of your mind; if it is racing, gently, without judgment, bring it back to observing the sensations in and around your body. You can walk very slowly or at an aerobic clip; experiment to find what feels the best to your body, mind, and spirit, knowing it may be different from one day to the next. When you are finished, take a moment to stand in stillness, to notice how that feels, and to breathe fully and deeply.

### Taking Meditation into Everyday Life

The pace and situations of our society are such that we're often far away from the quiet, safe meditation space we've created at home. While you can practice any of the techniques mentioned anywhere, breath and walking meditations are probably the most comfortable to transport into the real world. Try them at various locations, under various circumstances to know which will be most helpful in a variety of situations. You can practice walking meditation as you move from one place to another, even if you're just walking a short distance down the hall. Breathing meditations can be practiced while still or moving, in almost any environment. Experiment to find what feels the most helpful, comfortable and natural.

Mindfulness is another great tool. It helps us live in the moment, being fully present to each experience, keeping the mind from racing off with regrets about the past or worries about the future. The idea of mindfulness is just to notice every detail of an experience you're having – what you see, smell, hear, taste, and touch. Notice the colors, sounds, and textures around you, the smell in the air, the taste of your food. Notice what you are doing, what you are feeling (emotionally and physically), the people around you. If you're washing your hands, notice the feeling of the soap on your hands and of the water running over them, the sight of the bubbles, the fragrance of the soap; notice the temperature of the water, the texture of the soap; watch the water running over your hands and down the drain. Mindfulness requires your full attention on the present moment. If you notice your thoughts starting to wander, your mind engaging in internal dialogue, just gently bring it back to the present.

