

Plan a Quiet Time



CHALLENGE

**Take quiet time
for yourself
each day.**

Requirements to Complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™

1. Keep a written record of the days you spend at least 15 minutes in calm and quiet each day.
2. Read "Benefits of quiet time," "What about meditation?," and "How to find the time."
3. To complete the Challenge, schedule and take at least 15 minutes of personal or "quiet" time on at least 22 days this month.
4. Keep a record of your completed Challenge in case your organization requires documentation.

Benefits of quiet time

When stress increases and your life speeds up, make a conscious choice to slow down. Quiet time is a mini-vacation for your body and soul that can help you be happier and healthier. Most people will tell you they have too much to do, too little time in which to do it, and no way of ever catching up.

Stress, tension, anxiety, and fear can all take a toll on your body. Studies show that taking time to relax, meditate, pray, read, think, or just "be" can improve both mental and physical health.

Quiet time and self-discovery

Stress comes from within and is determined by how you respond to a situation, not the situation itself. Everyone responds to his or her own way. What may be fearful and stressful to you might be stimulating and exciting to someone else – for example, speaking to a large audience or climbing a mountain.

Some stressors are beyond your direct control, such as world hunger and high prices. Tell yourself that you will learn to accept the realities you can't change and focus on the stressors you know you can influence.

What about meditation?

Meditation isn't a practice about "doing" but rather one of "being" with yourself as you are. The goal in meditation is not to change anything about what is going on inside your mind or to stop your thoughts, but to simply help you rest within yourself. Some people refer to meditation as conscious relaxation.

There are many types of meditation: sitting, mantra, walking, dance, yoga, and spiritual contemplation. Research has shown that Transcendental Meditation®, mindfulness meditation, chanting, Bible study, and personal prayer all offer similar benefits.

Meditation practices are often rooted in spiritual practices, but many people practice meditation outside of a religious context. Through meditation you become aware (mindful) of thoughts, feelings, and sensations, and observe them in a nonjudgmental way. This results in you becoming calmer and physically relaxed.

Meditation is also a powerful tool for regulating emotion and increasing self-awareness. People also meditate to help their anxiety, pain, depression, stress, or insomnia. Meditation has been found to lower blood pressure and contribute to a stronger immune system.

Results of a remarkable study published in *Stroke* (journal of the American Heart Association) showed that the accumulated fatty plaque on artery walls actually diminished in people who meditated 20 minutes twice a day! These physical benefits of meditation are possibly due to the body's reaction to a reduced amount of stress hormones, decreased heart rate, lower blood pressure, reduced oxygen consumption, or even changes in brain-wave activity. It is now well established that the meditative state can be associated with changes in electrical function of the brain, and recent imaging studies suggest that there may actually be changes to the structure of the nervous system as well.



Most types of meditation have 4 common elements:

- 1. A quiet location.** Meditation is usually practiced in a quiet place with as few distractions as possible. This is particularly helpful for beginners.
- 2. A specific, comfortable posture.** Depending on the type being practiced, meditation can be done while sitting, lying down, kneeling, standing, walking, or in other positions.
- 3. A focus of attention.** The easiest place to begin is to focus on your breath – as it enters your body, travels to your lungs, and then flows out again. Using visualization, you can fill your mind with positive thoughts or pleasant memories, and feel yourself there. Try focusing on a natural, relaxing setting, like near a brook babbling over stones. Some people focus on sensing the presence of a spiritual power.
- 4. An open attitude.** This means you let distractions come and go naturally without judging them. Rather than suppressing distracting or wandering thoughts, you gently bring your attention back to the focus.

As research continues to demonstrate the strong correlation between spirituality and good health, people are discovering that meditation is a simple and practical way to find peace and calm wherever they are, regardless of the situation. They feel rested, de-stressed, and clear-headed.



How to find the time

Set your priorities. Spend quality time on the most important things in your life. If you're too busy for 15 minutes of personal quiet time, you're too busy! Learn to say "no" when you're overwhelmed. When you take on a challenge, make sure you have the time and energy to do your best.

- **Seek balance.** Work, play, relax, exercise, contemplate, and relate to others.
- **Choose to do calming things.** You can quiet your mind while walking, or sipping tea on your backyard patio early in the morning before the rush of the day begins, reading something inspirational or escapist, looking at the stars, enjoying a sunset, or watching the ocean.
- **Take up a serene hobby.** Maybe it's playing an instrument, knitting, bird-watching, or fly-fishing. Choose something that will help you slow down and enjoy the moment.
- **Bring the outdoors indoors.** Nature-inspired décor can help you relax.
- **Get tasks done on time.** Procrastination causes stress and anxiety.
- **Focus within with Tai Chi, meditation, or prayer.** You'll acquire a clearer perspective and better control over the anxiety-riddled external world.
- **Learn to "be still"** and experience the "now."
- **Embrace silence.** Being in a loud-noise environment will cause the body to secrete stress hormones. Chronic high levels of these stress hormones, such as cortisol and adrenaline, can actually lead to high blood pressure, stroke, and heart failure. Wearing earplugs can help you block out loud noise.



When problems and worry creep into your quiet time...

To keep negative thoughts or worries from creeping into your quiet time, pick a time and place to do your worrying. Give yourself 30 uninterrupted minutes to think about all of your concerns and what to do with them. Instead of dwelling on what might happen, focus on what's really happening and what you can do about it. Start with things that cause you the least anxiety and work your way up to the tougher stuff. Then write down your ideas and practical solutions.

With some planning, most stressors – including on-the-job conflicts, monthly bills, and finding enough family time – can be managed. If you try these ideas and don't feel more in-control after a few weeks, talk to your doctor or a professional therapist – particularly if you are anxious, fatigued, irritable, uninterested in work or hobbies, unable to concentrate, or not sleeping well. You might be struggling with depression, a serious but treatable medical condition.

Sources:

- National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. 2011.*
- American Journal of Nursing. 2009;109(11) Suppl TCAB:29-32.*
- Kabat-Zinn J. Wherever You Go There You Are. New York:Hyperion. 2005.*
- Castillo-Richmond A, et al. Stroke. 2000;31(3):568-573.*
- Patsy Grey Enterprises. LearningMeditation.com. 2011.*



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Instructions

1. Post the Health Challenge Calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. To complete the Challenge, schedule and spend at least 15 minutes in quiet time on at least 22 days this month.
3. At the end of the month, total the number of days you took 15 minutes or more of quiet time for yourself. You must meet this goal on at least 22 days during the month to complete the Challenge. Then keep up this health practice for a lifetime of best health!
4. Keep this record for evidence of completion.

MONTH:							HC = Health Challenge ex. min. = exercise minutes
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary
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_____ Number of days this month I took at least 15 minutes of quiet time for myself
 _____ Number of days this month I got 30+ minutes of physical activity such as brisk walking



Other wellness projects completed this month:

Name _____ Date _____