

FEATURES

For thousands of years the ancient yogis practised meditation to increase their energy. Now science has finally conceded the benefits of their techniques. Jane Alexander offers some useful tips on getting the best from everyday routines

Breathing energy into life

The benefits of meditation are myriad and they are certainly not all in the mind. The ancient yogis believed meditation was a powerful tonic which produces an acceleration of energy in the body.

Positive thoughts, they said, could rejuvenate cells and put the brakes on ageing. For thousands of years disciples had to take their word for it, but now science is proving that meditation really is powerful medicine.

In more than 450 well-documented studies worldwide, researchers have found that meditation reduces hypertension, serum cholesterol and blood cortisol, all of which are related to stress.

It has also been found effective in reducing the effects of serious illnesses such as angina, chronic headaches, diabetes, allergies and irritable asthma, and can even help relieve dependence on alcohol and cigarettes.

Regular meditators see their doctors less often and spend 70% fewer days in hospital. Anxiety, depression and irritability all decrease with regular sessions of meditation, while memory improves and reaction times become faster.

Meditators, it appears, also have more stamina, a happier disposition and even enjoy better relationships than the rest of us. Fortunately, however, you can now gain the benefits of meditation without paying huge tuition fees and without spending long periods of the day in the lotus position.

In his book, The 2-Minute Meditator (Plaitus), David Harp shows how to fit meditation easily into normal daily life. His suggestions are simple — and they work.

We've put together a plan which is beautifully easy to do and can also give you health and happiness a huge boost. The following meditations can help you beat stress and build

confidence, achieve inner peace and greater well-being, wherever you are and whatever you are doing. And, if you're embarrassed about the idea of meditating, these suggestions are so subtle that nobody need even realise you are doing it.

You don't need to practice all of these meditations. Start with just one or two, or practice different ones depending on your taste or circumstances. For true benefits you should try to fit in at least one of these meditations every day.

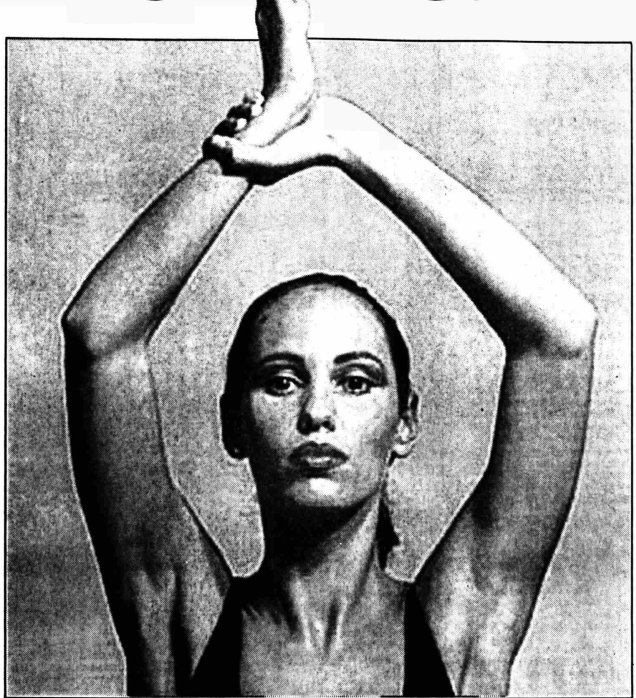
**On The Shower** This is a powerful meditation which allows you to test the limits of your concentration and helps you to increase your control over your body and emotions — great if you have a stressful day ahead.

Get in the shower with the water at its normal temperature. Begin your meditation by focusing on your breathing. Become aware of each individual in and out breath. If your mind wanders at any point, gently bring it back to concentrate on your breathing again. Once you feel relaxed and in control, turn down the temperature of the water until it's a bit colder than you usually prefer — again keeping your mind focused on your breaths.

Now slowly turn the water up to a slightly warmer temperature than your prefer — focus on your breathing. Now slowly alternate the temperature of your shower between a bit too hot and a bit too cold. Concentrate on how your body feels and what is going on in your mind. Recognise each feeling and then gently breathe in and out and let it go.

Concentrating on the alternating temperatures helps us stay centred in our minds, no matter what is happening on the outside.

**Walking** Relax and enjoy the day ahead. You can easily perform this meditation while walking to work or on the way back from taking the children to school. Walk a bit more



slowly than usual and start to focus your attention on the ins and outs of your breath. Mentally say 'in' as you inhale and 'out' as you exhale. Now see if you can begin each in and each out breath exactly as one of your feet hits the ground. Notice how many steps you take during each inhalation and how many steps you take during each exhalation. Count each step as you walk and breathe, say: 'In, two, three, four ... Out, two, three, four ... In, two, three, four' etc. Your own personal rhythm may be different from these, which is fine. Just breathe, and walk, and count.

**Eating** This meditation can be very powerful if you have problems with weight or difficulty dieting, as it can pinpoint the emotions that lie behind your eating habits. Concentrating closely on what and how you eat also means that you will tend to eat less before you feel satisfied. Once your food is in front of you, spend a moment focusing on your breathing, as before. Then, slowly, begin to eat. Focus your attention on each part of the eating process, lifting the fork or spoon, choosing which forkful of food to pick up, placing the food in your mouth, lowering the fork, chewing the food, noticing the taste, swallowing, then

texture and taste of each mouthful. Be aware of any thoughts that come into your head as you eat: maybe greed, sadness, loneliness?

**Driving** This can be extremely stressful, particularly when faced with a long journey or rush hour traffic. Calm your nerves and fend off road rage with this simple exercise.

Concentrating on the minute details of driving will also help you to take your mental focus away from other problems that are bothering you in your following. Your breath, your minds are lost in the past or the future. We talk, listen to the radio, eat, drink or smoke, keeping 'half an eye' on the road.

With conscious driving you start to focus your attention exclusively on your driving, to the exclusion of all other thoughts — as if you were a Formula One driver in the race of your life (but without the speed). Pay attention to every factor: your speed, the road in front of you, the positions of other cars around you, the road conditions, what lies ahead, what lies in your mirror. Should any thoughts not connected with driving enter your mind, notice them and gently return your attention to driving.

**Lemon** If you are meeting someone for an important business lunch, dinner or drink, this is the ideal meditation to help calm your nerves and focus your thoughts. Bars and restaurants usually have a ready supply of lemons to focus on if your visualisation skills are poor.

Picture a lemon in your mind's eye, as clearly as possible, as yellow as the sun, its thick skin minutely wrinkled, feeling a touch oily to the hand. Imagine digging your fingernail into the peel and 'see' a tiny spray of citric acid arch into the air. Visualise pulling some peel off to expose the white fibres covering the juicy, wet, pulpy insides.

You 'smell' the tartness as you bite deep into the lemon, and taste the sourness. The saliva leaps into your mouth. If you are able to visualise the lemon with any clarity, your mouth was probably watering even before you imagined biting into it.

**Hot Pepper** Practice this evening at home or on an evening out in a restaurant. You'll need a hot sauce or condiment such as Tabasco, cayenne pepper or horseradish sauce to hand. Spend a few minutes relaxing by consciously following your breath, becoming aware of its rhythm, focusing on each in and out breath.

Now drop a tiny amount of hot pepper or chili sauce on your tongue. Try to focus on the burning sensation on your tongue. Observe your thoughts. Do you want to rush for a glass of ice water, yell at the waiter, be angry at the exercise itself, be angry at yourself, cry? Does your body of jaw tense up? Your eyes tear, the road in front of you, the positions of other cars around you, the road conditions, what lies ahead, what lies in your mirror. Should any thoughts not connected with driving enter your mind, notice them and gently return your attention to driving.

**Bed** This meditation promotes a strong feeling of connection, compassion and love between two partners. It's almost as though one breath is being shared between two people.

It's a very calming and soothing exercise — ideal for performing last thing at night. It also helps to build trust. First decide which of you will be the active partner. The inactive partner simply sits or lies comfortably, eyes closed, and breathes normally. The active partner sits close enough to watch the rising and falling of the inactive partner's chest, as they breathe. The active partner tries to match as closely as possible the breathing rhythm of the other, to begin the in-breath exactly as they do — to exhale for the same amount of time. On each exhale, the active partner will release the breathe with a sigh: 'Ahhhh.'

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**PLANNING APPLICATIONS**  
**WEXFORD COUNTY COUNCIL**  
Notice is hereby given that Thomas Martin intends applying for full planning permission to carry out alterations and extension to Cedar Lodge Hotel, Carriefforney, Newban, Co. Wexford.  
**WATERFORD CORPORATION**  
planning permission is being sought for A new shop front, E new signage and C elevational alterations to existing gable wall all at 40 Barrington St., Waterford by Mr. R. Mulligan.  
**DUBLIN CORPORATION** — Permission is sought to erect a 42.4 metre high microwave reflector mast at Eastern Breakwater, Dublin Port, for Dublin Port Company. Signed Chief Engineer Dublin Port.

**DUBLIN CORPORATION** — Planning permission sought for single storey extension to front and single storey kitchen extension to rear of Farnell Rd. D.12, for Robert Richardson.  
**BRAU URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL** — Del Direct wish to apply to the local authority for planning permission to erect, corporate sign on site at Boghill Dublin Port.  
**KERRY COUNTY COUNCIL** — Maurice Barrett, The Kerries Golf Course, intend to apply to Kerry County Council for permission to revise existing planning application Ref. No. 82/97 to the site at Kerries Estate, Tralee, Co. Kerry.

**Tony Quinn Health Centres**  
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**PLANNING APPLICATIONS**  
**KERRY COUNTY COUNCIL** — Maurice Barrett, The Kerries Golf Course, intend to apply to Kerry County Council for permission to revise existing planning application Ref. No. 82/97 to the site at Kerries Estate, Tralee, Co. Kerry.  
**CAVAN COUNTY COUNCIL** — Electricity Supply Board intend to apply to Cavan County Council for permission to replace our existing stave Mast at Cornasau (Clankee) by Ballisborough County Cavan with a free standing mast of the same height i.e. 36 metres. Larry Donald. Secretary.