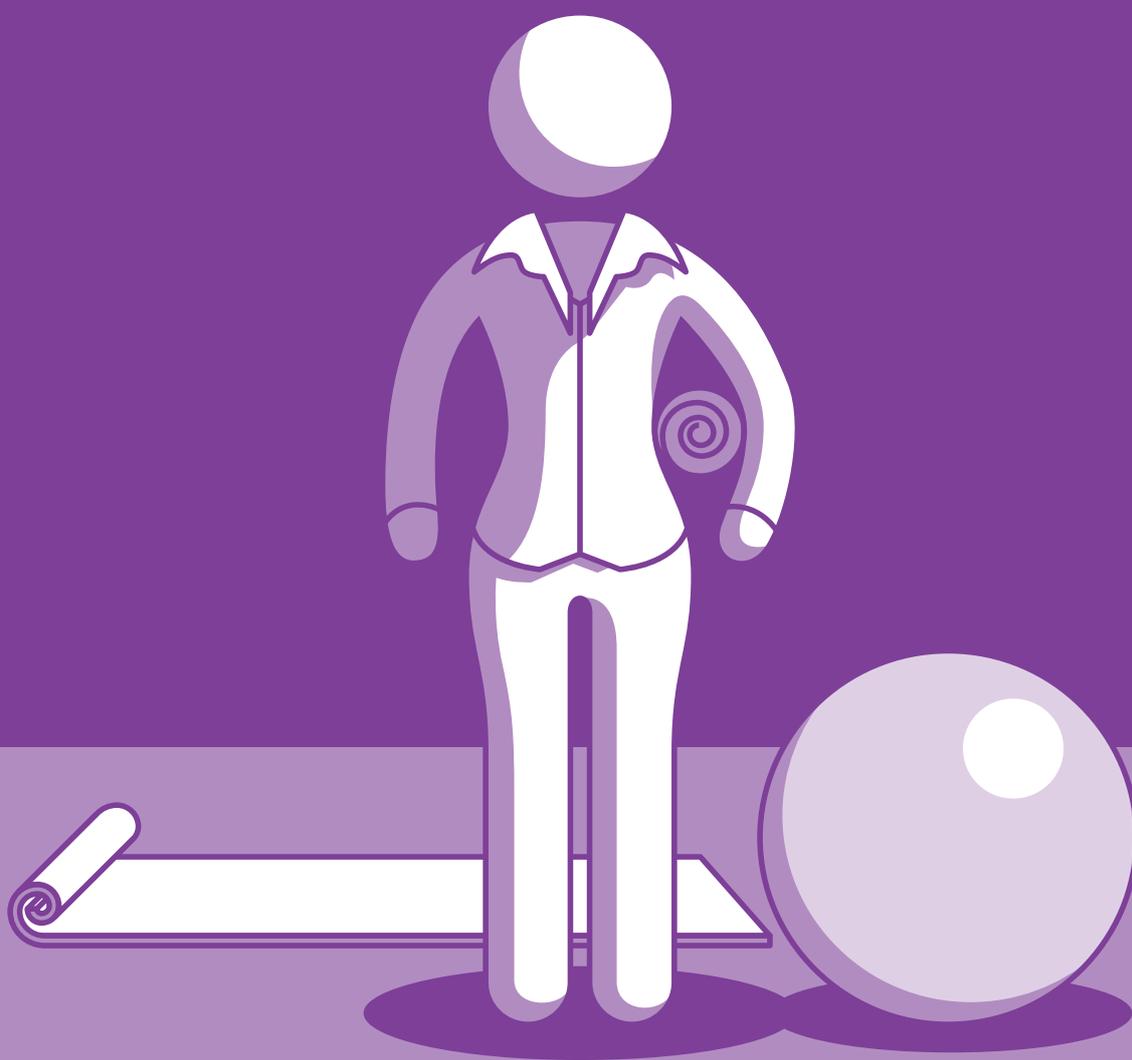


A step-by-step guide to meditation at work



Use these 13 meditation techniques to tackle stress, improve focus and improve your productivity at work.



Holistic health and wellness practices are becoming more widely accepted in developed countries, where ‘western medicine’ and its symptom-tackling-medicine approach are just part of the path to general well-being. Good mental health has been a key pillar of this new approach and the benefits of meditation, yoga and mindfulness are being enjoyed by increasing numbers.

The benefits of meditation at work

Aetna International’s Senior Medical Director Dr Lori Stetz explains that “Meditation is particularly useful in the workplace as studies have shown that practising mindfulness for at least 20 minutes a day can effect a deep psychological shift in the body to counteract the stress response, which is responsible for sleep problems, depression, pain and high blood pressure.”

Dr Lori explains that meditation has been shown to have multiple benefits – “from coping with feelings of hopelessness or sadness, balancing emotions, clearing our minds of fears to better navigate new challenges or environments, reducing age-related memory loss, developing heightened focus, finding space in your mind to prioritise tasks.” All these are skills that can only help people to feel and perform better.

Considering the list of benefits, it is easy to see why people are keen to use meditation at work – an environment that can be highly pressured, disruptive, stressful, chaotic and fast-moving.

Expats and work

Expats and those relocating abroad often face increased challenges at work. What are often demanding, high-pressure roles can be compounded by the stress of relocating to a new country with a different language and culture, buying a house and getting kids settled. Much of this is done without the familial support network of home so expats need to learn to be resilient and independent – and meditation can help. Read our expat guide: [9 fun mindfulness exercises for expat children you can do today.](#)

What are the benefits of mastering meditation in the workplace?

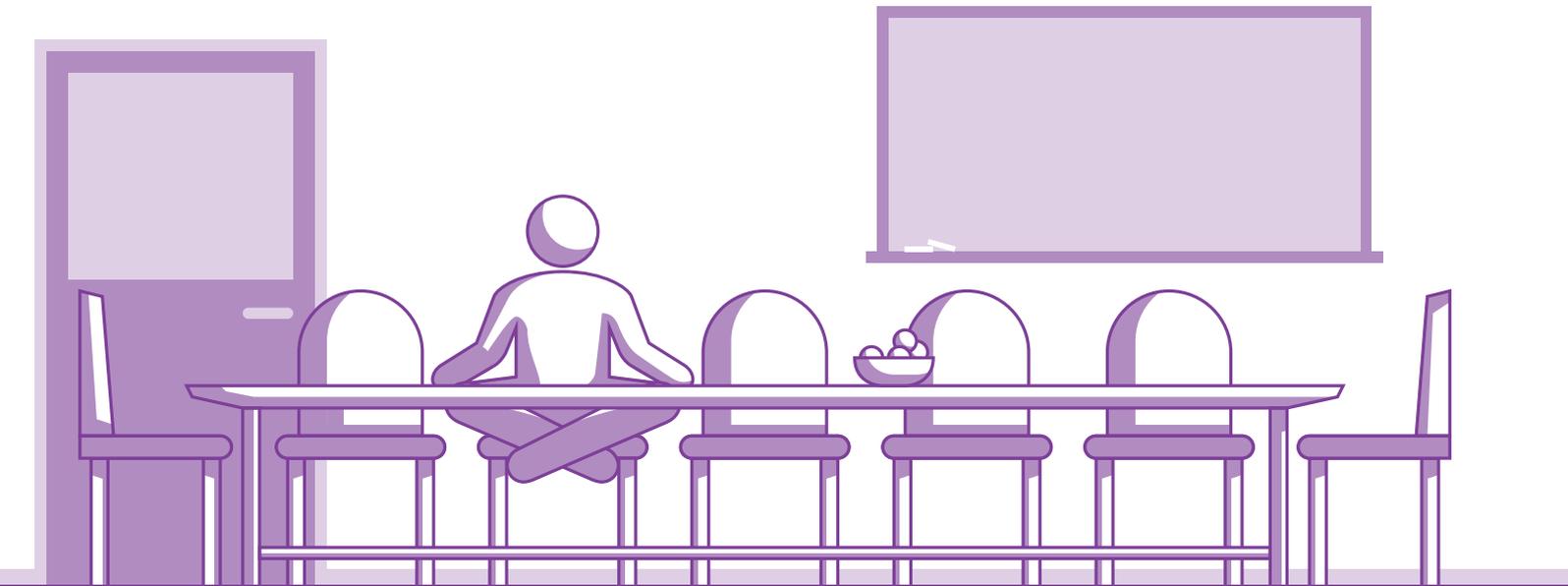
Meditating at work also has its own challenges with busy schedules, a lack of private space and people's opinions about us but championing it can help build a positive culture for everyone.

"There's an individual benefit but it can also help shape the overall work environment," says Dr Lori. "It gets people thinking and talking about their health: the benefits of self-care and their productivity."

"The mind is such a powerful tool and while it can be out of control and lead to anxiety or stress, it also has the power to master that anxiety and improve our mental well-being. It's a different approach to reaching for a pill to tackle the symptoms."

“Considering the list of benefits, it is easy to see why people are keen to use meditation at work”





What follows is a step-by-step guide to meditating at work, including different approaches and methods to match your unique needs and situation.

Meditation techniques for the workplace: a step-by-step guide

Start with five minutes of meditation on the first day and build daily by an additional five minutes until you can comfortably meditate for 20 minutes each day.

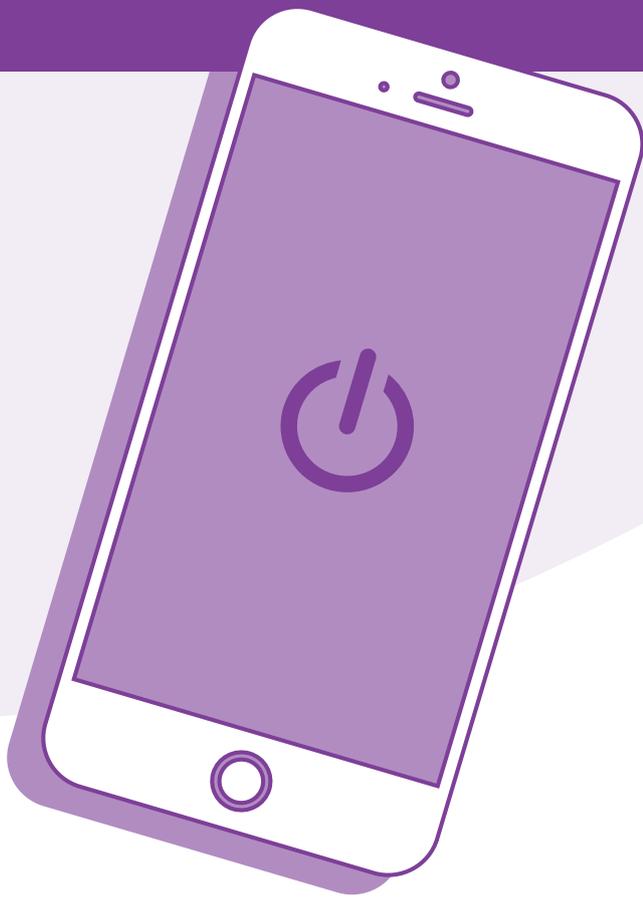
1. Schedule time to meditate

First, make time for meditation. Schedule it in at the same time every day, ideally earlier in the day.

2. Location, location, location

Find a quiet place with no distractions (sights and sounds) to meditate, for example:

- Meeting room. Find an empty meeting or conference room. You might even be able to book it in advance to ensure one is free.
- Outside. Find a quiet spot in a park or bench away from traffic, shops and schools.
- In your car. Make an excuse to go to your car and allow yourself five minutes to just sit in your car. Maybe use some binaural beats (see below).
- The bathroom. Sometimes this is the only place you can go for five minutes of quiet and calm
- At your desk. This is easier than it sounds, and you can help desk meditation by creating an oasis of calm with plants, rocks, wood or other natural materials to hold in your hands while meditating. Another method for meditating at your desk is to listen to 'binaural beats' – two tones that have slightly different frequencies, for example those in this [YouTube video](#) designed specifically for meditation and relaxation. Another desk-based method involves staring at one inanimate object for two to five minutes.



3. Switch off

Turn off notifications on your phone, or, better still, leave it behind. You may be hesitant to do this in your office, but it's an important step to getting the most out of your meditation. If you want to bring this guide, why not print it out?

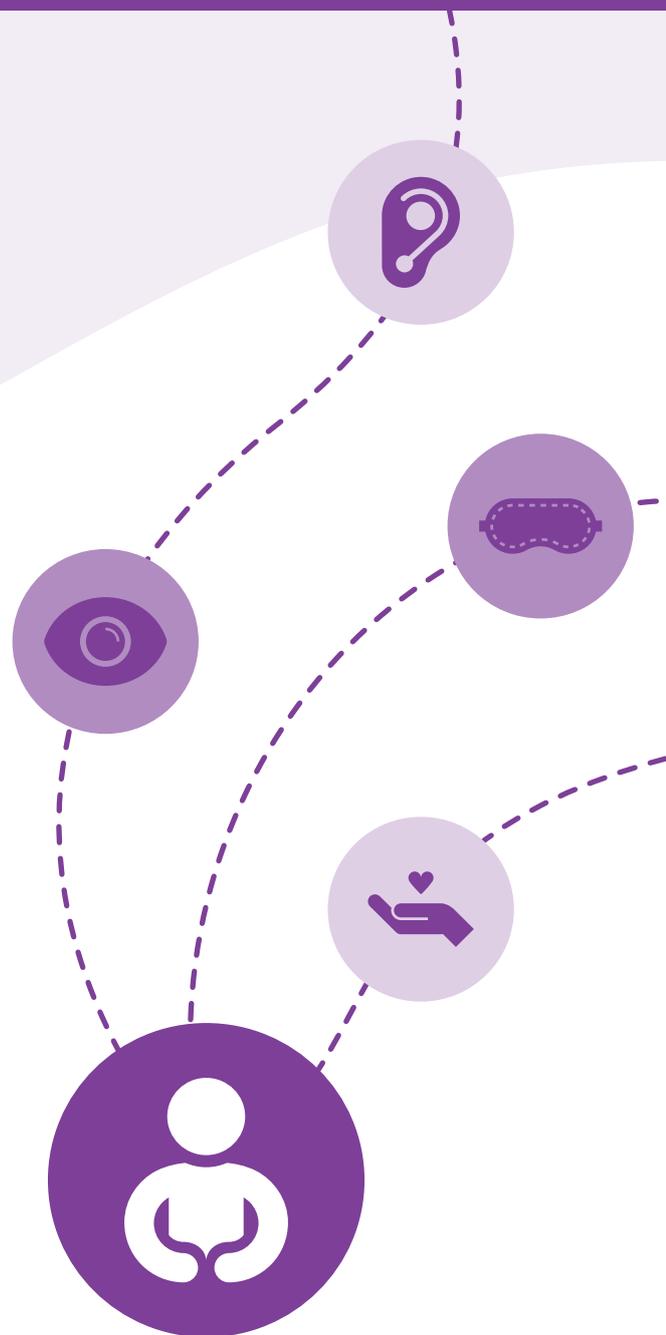
4. Get comfortable

Ensure that you're going to be able to meditate successfully by ensuring that you're comfortable – no pain, no restrictive clothing, and in a position that you can sustain for up to 20 minutes. Now close your eyes.

5. Count your breaths

One of the easiest ways to engage in mindfulness meditation is to focus on the breath. Take natural, even, rhythmic breaths and count them for five minutes. When you breathe in, count one; when you breathe out, count two. When you get up to 10, start from one again.

Breathing is an important part of meditation and one you can return your attention to if you become distracted or notice your mind starting to wander while meditating.



6. Focus on your senses

What can you hear? What can you smell? What can you feel? Focus on the sensations around you whether it's the feeling of your thumb touching your forefinger, or the sound of the air conditioning – and notice yourself sensing them.

7. Body scan

Focus on what various parts of your body are sensing, from your head to your feet. Note any discomfort or other sensations that exist in those locations. Then move on to another part.

8. Repeat a silent mantra

Meditation can involve chanting to focus the mind, for example this Hindi mantra, 'asato ma sad gamaya, tamaso ma jyotir gamaya, mrityor ma amritam gamaya' (which means 'From the unreal to the Real, lead me. From darkness to Light, lead me. From death to Immortality, lead me'). But you might choose to create your own mantra to repeat during meditation, for example: 'I am here, I am present, I am ready'. Align your words with your breath so that it can be rhythmic and consistent.

9. Visualisation

This technique uses visualisation to focus on a person, thing or place to hold attention and maintain a relaxed focus. For example, you may choose to imagine yourself in a glade in a forest. Notice the different colours of the leaves and the sound of the wind moving through them. If thoughts invade your visual, imagine them on a leaf that blows away on the wind as you remain in the calm presence of watching this scene take place.

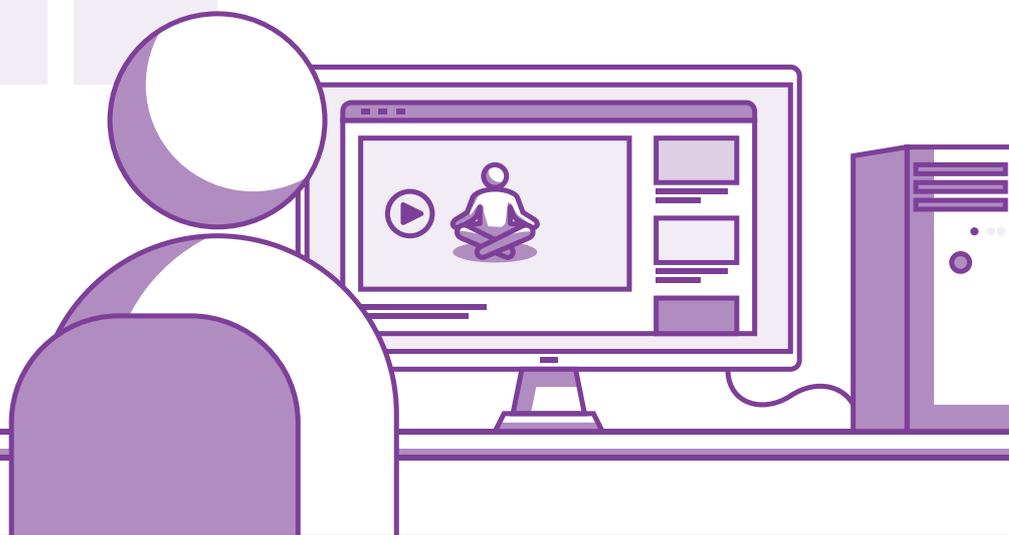
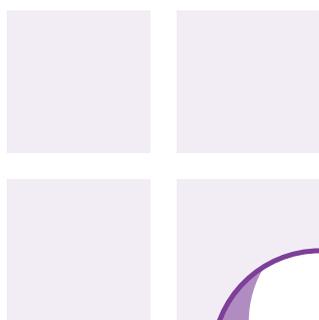
10. Emotive meditation

These two methods of meditation ask us to focus more on feelings and people than our breathing and surroundings:

- Focus on the image of a group of people – those you know, like or don't – and yourself at the centre. First direct goodwill onto yourself, and then feel that positivity spread outwards from yourself to the others. Imagine the goodwill reaching them and their reactions to receiving it.
- Focus on a single person you know or love and notice the sensations that come from your heart.

11. Guided meditation

Guided meditation is usually audio or video of someone directing and guiding listeners through one or more of the methods of meditation – for example, those above. Many people find guided meditation helpful – especially if we have trouble focusing and find our mind wandering back to work, and, as Thrive Global say: "With guided meditation, you don't need to know how to meditate. All that's required is that you listen". YouTube has a number of guided meditations and you may [find one that suits you](#). There is also a number of guided meditation apps, including [Headspace](#) and [Calm](#). See more [guided meditation apps](#).





12. One-minute express meditation

If you don't have time to meditate for 20 minutes do the following exercise for one minute, at the beginning and end of your day: Imagine that a beam of golden light runs through your body connecting you to the centre of the Earth and runs directly up into space. Imagine that you are inside this beam of light and that it keeps you present and safe. After 55 seconds, take a deep breath and begin your day.

13. Hire a meditation instructor for your office

There is a variety of reasons meditating at work can be a challenge, from time and concentration to feelings of guilt about indulging one's self. One solution to this is getting others involved to make meditation so everyone can benefit – you may even ask your boss to support your efforts by hiring a meditation instructor to guide your group in the office.

Read more about mindfulness:

- [How to practise mindfulness](#)
- [Mindfulness tips for expats](#)
- [11 health, wellness, stress and mindfulness techniques you can do in the office](#)

Try mindful eating at work

Instead of rushing through your lunch or mindlessly eating it while concentrating on other things, allow yourself time to be present as you eat – practise mindful eating. Notice the smell of the food and how it looks, savour each bite, how it sounds and feels as you take each mouthful. Focus on the flavours and textures of the food and imagine how all the ingredients interact to create them. Notice what it feels like to chew and swallow.

As well as helping you reset and re-focus for the second half of your day, mindful eating can also help you eat more healthily as you become more aware of what you've chosen to eat and what you're putting into your body. Read [How to eat healthy at work: 7 healthy eating tips for the office](#).

How we can help

Aetna International's comprehensive employee assistance services (including EAP), can help members with many issues and challenges. For example, we offer **mindfulness-based stress reduction training (Aware)** for those suffering from stress, anxiety or just want to improve their concentration. Click here for more information on our [Employee assistance services](#) – which includes therapeutic counselling, work-life services and manager assistance services.

If you're looking for [international private medical insurance, you can get an instant quote here](#) or, if you're an employer looking for health insurance for your international teams, [click here](#).



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