

long it has been around. Some estimate that it originated at least 2,500 years ago in Asia. It's modern-day popularity resurfaced in the 1960s with a spiritual resurgence. Since then, athletes from around the world have discovered its benefits.

How Do You Do It?

There are many different styles of meditation, and they all have similar results. So, you can choose the one that works best for you and do it as often as you like. Meditation may be difficult at first - there's a learning curve - but you'll find it easier as you practice. Try it for just 10 minutes to start, working your way up to 30 minutes or more.

So, what do you do? No matter what type of meditation you choose, it's important to be in a comfortable sitting position. If you lie down, you may just fall asleep, which defeats the purpose. You don't have to sit with your legs tangled like a pretzel or with your hands in any particular position. But keep your back straight, and sit in a way that will remain comfortable for several minutes.

Begin by concentrating on relaxing each part of your body, starting with your feet and working your way up. There's no right or wrong way to do this. Simply tell yourself that your feet are becoming relaxed, followed by your legs, and so on.

Concentrative Meditation

For this style, focus attention on your breathing, an image in your mind, a sound, or an object. Most people find it easier to meditate with eyes closed, so staring at an object is not especially popular. The easiest method is to focus on your breathing. You simply concentrate on inhaling and exhaling. When any distracting thoughts come into your mind, just return focus to your breathing. Try saying the word "one" silently on every out breath to assist your focus. If this still proves difficult, you can sound a tone or chant a word out loud

with each exhalation.

Visualizing Meditation

You might want to try concentrative meditation first, but if it proves difficult, go straight to visualizing after the body relaxation. Go on a little journey within your mind to a peaceful garden, a beach, or anywhere else you like. Try to experience the sights, sounds, smells, textures and tastes as if you were really there. This is the method to use when visualizing yourself bench pressing those extra pounds or finishing the marathon in record time.

Mindfulness Meditation

This type of meditation involves simply staying aware of whatever is happening. It keeps you in the moment by asking you to witness whatever goes on in your mind, your body, or the sounds around you as you sit quietly. It helps you to be less reactive to what's happening by putting you in a place of merely observing inner and outer reality. If you're the type that tends to get distracted, this is a great method. Plus, it gets you more in tune with your body, which might even help to avoid injury.

Whatever style of meditation you try, you'll be surprised to discover the many ways you can use it to improve your performance inside and outside the gym. Besides that, you will find yourself using it to calm down in stressful moments. Who would have thought just sitting around could actually help you be more fit?

Resources

JayneStorey.com - Jayne Storey, Performance Enhancement - Maximizing Athlete and Team Potential in all sports, using Chi Kung, Tai Chi and Zen Meditation.

Sports Psychology Tools for Athletes from Mental Game Expert Dr. Patrick Cohn.

Melanie Votaw is a mediation teacher in New York and the author of seven books.

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