



the urban retreat 2013

guidance on meditation posture

If you've not meditated before, here are some simple notes for how to sit to meditate. This is just very simple basic guidance to help you start meditating. In books or at a meditation class you should be able to get more detailed help and advice about posture and the different ways of sitting, whether it is on cushions, meditation stools, or on a chair.

Obviously you want to be able to focus on the meditation and not be distracted by discomfort or physical pain. But there is a deeper reason than this why meditation posture is important. The body and the mind are connected – all part of your being. Worries or irritabilities in the mind can manifest as tightness and tension in the body. Positive emotions such as joy or contentment will also be mirrored in the body – as aliveness, ease, and energy. So, mind affects the body. We experience the mind through the body.

It works both ways. Body posture also affects the mind. If you have qualities of ease, stillness, and groundedness in the body, this will flavour the mind and help your meditation. So, try sitting for meditation now, move around and see what is comfortable, looking for a posture that is...

Grounded – you are comfortable and stable, you can let your body weight relax and feel the chair or cushion support you, and so you can feel “earthed” and “rooted”.

Upright and alert – lying down might be the most comfortable posture for many people, but the trouble is you might also fall asleep! So, it is usually best to sit reasonably upright, and to find a chair that supports this. Obviously you don't want to be rigidly upright, but just letting the back and spine grow naturally upwards.

Relaxed in the shoulders – check your shoulders can relax and that you are not hunched over in a way that scrunches up the shoulders, or holding your arms and hands in a place where the shoulders are strained. Rest the arms and hands in your lap or on the arm of the chair and let the shoulders go.

Balanced in the head and neck – the weight of the head is quite considerable (it is that big brain you've got!), so check it is balanced and not straining the neck and shoulder muscles. You can gently rock the head from side to side, looking for a mid-point. You can also gently tilt the head back and forward; you are looking for a point with the head slightly tilted forward so there is a slight feeling of extension in the back of the neck and, hopefully, a sense of poise and balance.

Allowing ease and letting-go – try and “let-go” in the shoulders, try to allow the face to be soft and relaxed, especially round the eyes and forehead, and around the mouth and jaw (all places where we can clench up and hold tension).

Allowing stillness – it may take time to learn to sit in a comfortable way. That is all part of the process of learning meditation. If you experience slight feelings of restlessness and discomfort, you might

decide to stay still and sit through them. But if there is more severe pain and discomfort, then obviously you may need to change posture.

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