

Beginning Meditation: Setting Up

Week 1 · Yoga Wise Meditation Course

Choosing the Right Posture

There are many routes into meditation and countless techniques across modern and ancient traditions. One thing most sources agree on is this: an upright spine in a comfortable position.

This might be on a chair, on a cushion, kneeling, cross-legged, or lightly supported if needed. What matters most is that you can stay steady and comfortable for the duration of your practice without needing to shift repeatedly.

It's also helpful to remember that meditation is not the same as relaxation. The mind is awake and attentive in meditation. Meditation begins with concentration.

“Meditation does not make the mind dull. Rather, in meditation the mind is still but razor sharp, silent but vibrant with energy.”

Iyengar (1990)

Lying down can be an option, but usually only as a last resort, as it often leads to sleepiness or drifting into relaxation rather than the clear, alert attention we are cultivating.

Why an Upright Spine?

An upright spine supports an alert, balanced nervous system. Many traditional teachings describe the spine as central to both physical stability and mental clarity.

The purpose of a meditation posture is to create harmony in the muscles and nerves, reducing agitation, friction, and discomfort so that attention can settle more easily.

Three Practical Posture Options

Sitting on a Chair

A chair is an excellent option if kneeling or sitting on the floor is uncomfortable.

Sit towards the front edge of the chair with the feet flat on the floor or on firm blocks if needed. Allow the knees and feet to be comfortably apart. Keep the head, neck, and spine aligned, with the hands resting on the thighs.

Try to avoid leaning back into the chair, as this can make the mind too relaxed or drowsy. A kneeling office-style chair can also be a helpful support.

Kneeling (Vajrasana)

Begin in a kneeling position with the thighs together and the torso upright. The feet rest behind you, and the body lowers towards the heels.

If this is uncomfortable, place blocks or a cushion between the heels and sit back onto the support. A meditation bench can also work well. Blankets under the feet and ankles can help ensure comfort and reduce distraction.

The aim is ease and steadiness, not forcing the body into a shape.

A Cross-Legged Seat

A cross-legged seat can offer a stable base from which the spine can rise naturally.

Sitting on a folded blanket or block to lift the hips often reduces strain in the hips and inner thighs. Cushions can be used so the knees drop comfortably.

Some traditional cross-legged postures include a simple cross-legged seat, Swastikasana (Auspicious Pose), Siddhasana (Accomplished Pose), or half-lotus. Full lotus is not suitable for most people for longer meditation sessions.

If you use a wall at first, keep the support light. Too much support can encourage drowsiness.

A helpful phrase to remember is **Sthira Sukham Asanam** – the seated posture should be steady and comfortable.

Preferred Conditions for Meditation

Once you've established how to sit, it helps to consider where and when to practise. Meditation does not require perfect conditions and can happen anywhere, but supportive conditions make it much easier to build consistency.

A clean, tidy, uncluttered space is helpful, along with as much quiet and privacy as possible. Sitting at a regular time and in the same place each day can be very supportive. Early morning or early evening are often ideal, though mid-afternoon works well for some people.

“Little by little, through patience and repeated effort, the mind will become stilled in the self.”

Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 6, verse 25

Wear comfortable, non-restrictive clothing. Some people enjoy having a dedicated meditation outfit, though this is optional.

Avoid meditating immediately after a large meal, as a full stomach can feel heavy and sluggish. At the same time, an empty stomach can be distracting.

“Those who eat too much or too little, who sleep too much or too little, will not succeed in meditation.”

Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 6, verse 16

Try not to meditate when you are very tired. Meditation asks for a clear, alert mind. On low-energy days, a shorter practice is often more appropriate.

Creating a Simple Ritual

If possible, dedicate a small corner of a room to meditation. Even a modest space helps the mind recognise that this is where you practise.

You might include a candle, a plant, a meaningful object, or a small cloth or low table. You may also like to begin your practice with a simple ritual such as chiming a bell, chanting Om, lighting a candle, or taking a few quiet breaths.

These rituals are not essential, but they can be powerful. We are creatures of habit, and small repeated cues help the mind settle more quickly. Over time, even a simple sound or scent can gently guide you into a meditative state.

© Emma Turnbull · Yoga Wise · Meditation Course