

Implementation Intentions: Turning Intention into Daily Practice

What Is an Implementation Intention?

An implementation intention is a simple but powerful psychological tool that helps bridge the gap between wanting to practise meditation and actually doing it.

The concept was developed by psychologist Peter Gollwitzer and has been widely studied in behavioural psychology, including research published in journals such as the British journal of Psychology.

At its core, an implementation intention uses an if–then plan:

If a specific situation occurs, then I will carry out a specific action.

This turns a vague intention into a clear, embodied commitment.

Why Good Intentions Often Don't Become Habits

Many people genuinely want to meditate regularly, yet struggle with:

- Forgetting
- Feeling too busy or tired
- Waiting for the “right mood”
- Losing momentum after a few days

Implementation intentions work because they:

- Remove the need for willpower in the moment
- Attach practice to an existing routine
- Make the decision ahead of time, not when motivation is low

How Implementation Intentions Work

Psychological research shows that if–then plans:

- Increase awareness of cues (time, place, routine)
- Automate behaviour once the cue appears
- Reduce internal negotiation (“Shall I practise or not?”)

Over time, the practice begins to feel natural rather than forced.

Creating Your Own Implementation Intention

Follow these simple steps:

1. Clarify Your Intention

What do you want to practise consistently?

Examples:

- Daily meditation
- Evening pranayama
- Short moments of mindfulness

2. Choose a Reliable Cue

Pick something that already happens every day:

- A time of day
- A routine (tea, brushing teeth, closing your laptop)
- A physical location

3. Create an If-Then Statement

Be specific and realistic.

Examples:

- “If I finish my morning tea, then I will sit for 5 minutes of meditation.”
- “If I roll out my yoga mat, then I will begin with three conscious breaths.”

Gentle but Consistent Is the Key

Implementation intentions work best when:

- The practice feels achievable
- You allow flexibility (even 2–5 minutes counts)
- You meet resistance with compassion, not force

This approach supports meditation as a living practice, not another thing to succeed or fail at.

Reflection Prompts

You may like to journal or reflect on:

- What usually stops me from practising?
- What cue already exists in my day that I can link my practice to?
- How can I make my practice feel nourishing rather than demanding?