MENTAL MUSCLE
Top athletes who have incorporated meditation into their training include Simone Biles, Novak Djokovic, and Tom Brady.

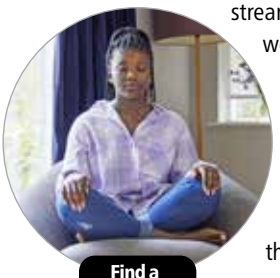
Relax with meditation

This practice can help you lower stress and feel more calm in a few minutes a day.

If you have ever felt anxious, stressed, or frustrated, there is a way you can help yourself to feel calmer and more relaxed. It's called mindful meditation, which is the practice of focusing the mind for the purposes of reflection or relaxation. Anyone can learn to meditate, and it can be done nearly anywhere. Here's how you can get started.

Get in the right mindset

First, pick a spot that will be quiet and comfortable. You can seat yourself in a chair or on a beanbag, sit on the floor on a cushion or pillow, or lie down on a bed or a couch. Turn on soft lighting, like a table lamp or LED string lights, to set the mood to meditate.



Find a comfy spot

Pay attention to breathing

Take a breath. Notice how the oxygen feels when it enters your body. Is your breath long or short? Shallow or full? Place a hand on your chest to feel it rise and fall. See if you can start to breathe more deeply. Inhale a deep breath and allow it to fill up your belly. As you exhale (let the breath out), feel your whole body relax. Keep taking these deep inhales and exhales while focusing on your body. Start at the top of your body and work down to your toes, squeezing and relaxing the muscles.

Add visualization

While you are practicing your breathing, you can visualize things that make you feel calm. That could be a lake or a river, a field of flowers, or a sky filled with puffy clouds. If you like, imagine putting each of your worries onto a leaf and placing the leaves in a stream. Then envision watching your worries drift away.

End gently

When you've meditated for a few minutes, give yourself another minute to sit and think about how you feel. Now aim to carry that good feeling into the rest of your day or night. You can end your meditation by giving yourself a hug or a pat on the back.

Make it a habit

You can practice mindful meditation daily, at anytime you like. That might be in the morning before school, before a big test or competition, or in the evening to relax before going to sleep. For more ideas to help you relax, see the box at right.

Mindful practices

In addition to traditional meditation, many other activities focus on mindfulness, Here are a few.

Tai chi **In the ancient Chinese discipline of tai chi (pictured above), meditative, flowing motions are practiced as a series of connected movements.**

Yoga **This system of poses (like "downward dog" and "happy baby") and breathing techniques promotes physical and emotional well-being.**

Walking meditation **In this practice, meditation is done while walking and focusing on the calming sights and sounds of the natural outdoors.**