

# The Meditation Toolbox

Basic meditation, referred to as *calm abiding*, is used to cultivate a calm and expansive awareness while also developing one's mental faculties (concentration/focus, fortitude, mental/emotional stability). The ultimate aim of calm abiding is to achieve *present moment awareness*, a mental state of *single pointed concentration* that is neither lost in future worry or past regret. Instead of offering one static technique, I prefer to share a meditation toolbox so my friends can develop an adaptive meditation practice that fits their own unique mindset. Here, I present the following techniques as four sequential steps within a single calm abiding meditation session, although each technique may also be used independently.

1. **Calming meditation** - Begin by sitting in an alert posture either on a cushion on the floor or on a chair. One's hands are on their thighs, one's eyes are partially or fully closed. The head is tilted slightly downward, the teeth slightly parted, and the tongue resting at the roof of the mouth, touching the back of the top teeth—helping to reduce salivation. Next, one focuses their awareness on the inflow-outflow of the breath (either at the chest or nostrils). One then simply tries to keep their focus on their breath, and, when the mind wanders (which it inevitably does), one gently and patiently brings their focus back to the breath—one does this over and over again, without judgment.
2. **Mantra meditation** - The next technique is to incorporate the silent recitation of a word or mantra to help focus and stabilize the mind. The mantra is used merely as a placeholder to focus and hold the mind. I recommend using the word '*meditating*' as a mantra, which works well on many levels. It focuses the mind, reminds us of the practice at hand, while helping to anchor us in the present moment. In this technique, we place our focus on the mantra instead of (or in concert with) the breath. One begins by saying the mantra silently to oneself, and periodically repeating it. Next, one slowly begins to soften their recitation of the mantra until it becomes a whisper; at the same time, one starts to let go of the mantra by reciting it less and less (or only as needed to limit mind wandering).
3. **Noting meditation** (our main meditation) - *Noting* refers to making *mental notes or labeling*. Here, one begins with calming meditation, focusing one's awareness on the breath. When comfortable, one silently says the word '*meditating*' *once* to initiate the meditation (Here, the repeated recitation of the mantra is abandoned). In this technique, when the mind wanders one notes it, in this case one notes it '*thinking*'. After noting it, one returns their focus back to the breath, and again, silently says '*meditating*' to initiate one's meditation. For more advanced meditators, physical and mental sensations, emotions, and experiences are also noting during meditation (noting a sound as *hearing*, noting a scent as *smelling*, or other notes like sleepy, anxious, itchy, bored, sad, etc.). In other words, wherever the mind's attention goes, one contently accepts it, notes it, and then gently brings their focus back to the breath (over and over again without judgment).
4. **Uninterrupted focus meditation** - Lastly, when one's focus becomes stable, one tries to sustain an uninterrupted focus on their breath for one minute. If successful one then tries for a longer duration, two, three, four, or five minutes, etc. Some advanced meditators are able to sustain an uninterrupted focus for hours at a time. It's important to understand, that in calm abiding we are not actively trying to suppress or stop thoughts or thinking—we are just watching the breath.