

# Wisdom House COLLABORATIVE

If We Want to Better Understand Our Minds, We Can Sit Down and Study Them.

There are many different methods of meditation with many different goals and effects. At Wisdom House we practice a particular kind of meditation, called “clear seeing” or “insight” meditation, related to our mission to cultivate mindfulness.

Mindfulness is a practice of paying attention on purpose to what is happening in the present moment with an interested and non-judgmental attitude. For most of us, this is not our current habit. We are not purposely aware of what is happening as it is happening. We are habitually carried off in thought loops and ruminations about past and future, and very judgmental about whether we like or don’t like what is arising in each moment. Studies show that we may spend half our day ruminating, lost in trains of thought, and living anxiously in anticipation or in blame. These ruminations take up a lot of bandwidth, crowding out positive interactions, and adding unproductively to cycles of stress, agitation, and distraction.

Mindfulness itself is a habit of mind that requires regular practice to build strength and momentum. Every moment of mindfulness is wholesome and productive, a creative vote to literally rewire our minds for more clarity, wisdom, and compassion. While the practitioner seeks to make a habit of “remembering to remember” to check their state of mind throughout the day, meditation is the laboratory and gymnasium where we really hone the skill and build the muscle of mindfully being with experience.

We can begin by learning a basic “sitting breath meditation”. We dedicate the time to let go of our problem solving and allow ourselves to unruffle. While our picture of meditation may look serious, we don’t want to be too stiff or too loose, our effort is like tuning a guitar string. We want to remain playful and curious, and to experiment to increase skill.

On a straight back chair or meditation cushion, we sit comfortably, upright, and alert. We can let our arms fall naturally then bend at the elbow to rest our palms on our legs or fold our hands comfortably in our laps. We close our eyes if that is comfortable, or choose a gentle gaze a few feet ahead. We settle in, and can feel contact with our seats. We open to sounds. We find our breath and feel each in-breath begin to draw and peak, and each out-breath open and flow to its end. We can feel how our breath proceeds on its own, and we invite awareness to settle into and follow the whole variety of sensations generated by the natural rhythm.

When we notice thoughts or other distractions have pulled our attention away from the breath we redirect our attention to aim and sustain at each half breath. We can make a soft mental note of “thinking” or “planning” or “fantasizing” and gently escort our attention back to our breath. Some people also like to practice a soft mental note counting each half breath to further anchor their attention as needed.

If we feel the pull of restlessness, we can acknowledge the sensation, remind ourselves of the commitment we made to sit, and see if we can redirect to the breath for this moment, and the next, and the next. When discomfort arises, we can acknowledge it, see if we can breath through it, and with allowing curiosity see if it changes on its own (itches are great practice!). We can give ourselves a virtual pat on the back for each return and each breath. As we open our awareness, we notice a greater number and detail of sensations arising and passing, and we learn the skill of noticing when our attention has been pulled away and how to unhook and return.

This practice will carry over in our day to day lives with its own momentum. Also, as we establish a more settled baseline sensation in meditation, it serves as a contrast and reveals our more afflicted or distracted states. As our minds and bodies learn to be more aware of the arising and presence of these states, we are alerted to be mindful, and we can practice unhooking and setting down any unhelpful agitations.

We hope that you find these basic beginning instructions helpful and wish to learn more about the practice. As with other physical and mental skills, mindfulness is a use or lose it capacity. We at Wisdom House want to be a trusted resource for continued learning and practice. Studies have shown that just 15 minutes of meditation a day reduces stress levels and brings well being. Other resources and guided meditations are linked on our website, [wisdomhouseomaha.org](http://wisdomhouseomaha.org).