

STOP! MEDITATE & LISTEN

Want to achieve more in life? Then just sit and do nothing. Yes, really

Meditation: lately it seems it's the on-trend thing to do, with lots of celebs endorsing its power and its own *Time* magazine cover. It sounds topsy-turvy, but there's proper science behind the idea that if you pause for a few moments a day, you'll actually get a lot more done. Meditation has been proven to increase levels of energy, help people become better organised and more able to take on the challenges of a stressful day - and win.

So what is it? It's easier to say what it isn't. According to Dr Mariette Jansen, who has written the brilliantly named *Bullsh*t, Non-sense And Common Sense About Meditation*, it's not about chanting, nor becoming a vegan. You don't need to get into the lotus position. Yes, it is sitting around doing nothing, but in a controlled way.

Studies show meditation helps us become more positive and can reduce anxiety and depression

Like anything, it takes practice at first to get the most benefits, but pretty soon you should get the hang of it, and will be able to incorporate it into everyday life. Best of all, you don't need special equipment or a gym membership, it doesn't matter how old or unfit you are, and it won't interfere with your religious beliefs (or lack of).

Think you haven't got time? You can meditate waiting at traffic lights, in a queue, or even walking back to your desk from the loo, says Mariette.

Why not just have a nap? Sleep doesn't necessarily mean rest, as anyone who is worrying about something knows. The minute your head hits the pillow, that's when anxieties usually surface. Meditation gives us the rest we need.

BE HERE NOW According to Eckhard Tolle, the author of *The Power Of Now*, 'mindfulness' is when you observe what you're doing instead of being involved in what you're doing. If that sounds a bit hippy, just think of 'being in the moment'. We've all had that experience when we've noticed a tiny thing - blossom on the trees, someone's smile - and it's lifted our spirits. Make the effort to have those little times - it's a great antidote to our rushed, busy lives.

IT ONLY TAKES A MINUTE, GIRL

Well, maybe three to five minutes to start with. Even if you've never tried anything like it before, give this a try...

- * **Sit comfortably, away from any distractions.** Have quiet music on if you want. Close your eyes if you like (obvs not if you're driving or in the office).
- * **Breathe normally,** becoming aware of the rise and fall of your chest.
- * **Concentrate on breathing** a little deeper and slower than you would usually.
- * **Let your mind go blank.** When thoughts pop into your head (and they will), don't worry, let them pass. Relax.
- * **There isn't a right or a wrong way to do this.** You're not trying to fall asleep, but if you do, it's probably because you're tired anyway.
- * **When the time is up** (set an alarm if you want to) you should feel alert but relaxed.
- * **That's it.** Not so scary now, is it?

IT'S OH SO QUIET Meditation isn't just for adults, it works for children too, and can solve a lot more problems than you'd think. At a secondary school in a rough part of San Francisco, where there used to be nine shootings a month, they tried Quiet Time. Students took two 15-minute sessions a day to meditate.

Within the first year, suspensions decreased by 45 per cent and attendance went up to 98 per cent. And best of all, their grades went up dramatically, with Maths improving the most. These were still tough kids with difficult home lives and a lack of opportunities. Their worries didn't go away: but the pupils said they found it easier to cope with stress, were less depressed and had higher self-esteem.