

Posture

The Buddha said meditation flows through all four postures; sitting, walking, standing and lying down, and in the transition between these postures.

Meditation is not limited to any particular posture, yet each of the four postures has a specific flavour, and effect on our heart-mind.

The sage Patanjali defined good meditation posture as the position in which you can be relatively still and steady.

Experiment with different postures, especially if you struggle with pain during much of the session, or if pain persists after you move out of your chosen posture.

It is not necessary to use the same position in every session, but it is worth staying in one posture for the duration of each session.

Notice how striving to find an imaginary perfect posture is just a nagging, unpleasant, mind-game. With acceptance of both body and mind as they are in the moment, an ease and stillness can begin to develop.

Sitting Posture

For many people sitting is the posture most suited to calmness and stability of the mind. Some traditions speak of sitting like a mountain.

Rest your hands comfortably on your knees or lap. Open your chest area. Relax your shoulders and bring them down and back. Slightly tuck your chin in, allowing the neck to be straighter than usual. Roll the top of your hips slightly forward, so that your abdomen opens and the spine is supported and straight. Angling the cushion or the seat of the chair can help your hips to tilt forward.

If sitting on cushions or a chair experiment to find the best height.

Sitting on the Floor:

We each need to find the right number of cushions, and organise them in a way that works for us. We may find we need cushions in more places than just under the buttocks, such as under the knees, ankles etc.

Japanese Style ~ Kneel with the buttocks resting on a cushion or bench. Make sure not to put too much weight, or strain, on the knees.

Burmese Style ~ Bend both legs, with knees pointing out to the sides, and with both lower legs and feet resting on the floor, one in front of the other. Alternate which leg is in front, if possible.

Lotus Style ~ Same as Burmese but with one, or both, feet and lower legs crossed on top of the opposite calf or thigh.

Thai or Sri Lankan Style ~ Bend one leg across the front with the knee pointing out to the side. Bend the other leg to one side so that the knee points to the front (and touches the base of the other leg's foot) and the foot points behind you.

Note: With all cross-legged positions, please alternate legs in alternate sittings: if the left leg is in front in one sitting, then have the right leg in front in the next sitting.

Sitting in a Chair:

Rest your feet firmly on the floor or a cushion, sit upright without leaning on the back of the chair if possible. Propping the back two legs of the chair up on small supports helps roll your hips forward, and keeps the front edge of the chair from cutting off circulation through the backs of the legs.

Reclining Posture

For many people, lying down is the position most suitable for being relaxed, open and still. Simply lying can express non-resistance to life.

If possible, lie on a soft surface.

Feel free to lie in the position most comfortable for you.

Lying on the Back ~ To support the lower back it helps to raise the knees or lower legs, with cushions or folded blankets. Usually without a pillow beneath the head.

Lying on the Side ~ To keep the spine aligned it helps to have a pillow under your head, and a cushion or folded blanket between your knees. Bending the knees together also helps to keep the spine straight.

Lying on the Front ~ So that there is not too much strain on the neck it may help to raise your "chin-side" shoulder slightly with a small pillow or folded cloth.

Walking Meditation

Walking meditation is a wonderful practice for developing connectivity.

Choose a flat place about ten meters long to walk back and forth.

Bring your attention into your body. It may be helpful to close the eyes and just stand for a few moments.

When you feel ready open the eyes, resting your gaze on the ground in front of you. Tune into your body and then slowly begin walking.

Experiment with what feels most helpful as the object for your attention. Either the sensations of the base of your foot making contact with the earth, then the sensations of lifting and moving it through the air, then finally placing it on the ground again. Or if your mind is steady and present you can be with the sense of the whole body walking.

Find the right pace. For most of us it is helpful to walk at a slower pace than our usual one, as this helps us connect to our sensations and surroundings.

Just enjoy one step at a time, as if you had all the time in the world.

If you become distracted; pause, reconnect, and begin afresh. When you reach the end of your path, stand, close the eyes, and tune in to the practice before turning around and beginning again.

Standing Meditation

Those who love standing meditation affectionately call it “the posture of no-escape”. Feel how standing like a tree supports natural wakefulness and effortless attention.

Choose a flat, stable and quiet place where you can just be. Standing near a tree can be a great support.

Place your feet shoulder width apart. Either let your arms hang by your side, or together at the waist.

Your eyes can be open; in which case soft and unfocused, or closed; the attention entirely within.

Feel into your posture. Is it soft, relaxed and open, while also stable and upright?

Check the head is well balanced over the body. Imagine a string tied to the top of your head pulling you up, then relax down into an erect yet curved spine.

So the energy in the body can flow freely, open the hips by rolling the pelvis forward, and bend the knees a little so that they are not locked tight.

You may wish to tune into your breath, the contact of the feet on the earth, the whole body standing, or just be - like the tree.