

EXERCISE: MEDITATION FOR REDUCING STRESS

Living in a hoarded home means you're constantly stressed—mentally, physically, and emotionally. Meditation is a tool that helps you calm your nervous system, process difficult emotions, and create a sense of peace even when your environment is chaotic.

You don't need to be good at meditation. You don't need a quiet space. You don't need special equipment. You just need a few minutes and a willingness to try.

This exercise teaches you simple meditation techniques that work even in difficult circumstances.

Time Needed

5-20 minutes



Energy Level

Low-Medium



What You'll Need

Just yourself; optional: headphones, timer

When to Do This

Whenever you're stressed, overwhelmed, anxious, or need to reset

How It Works

You'll learn several different meditation techniques and find which ones work best for you. Not every technique will resonate—that's normal. Try a few and keep what helps.

Why Meditation Helps

Meditation is scientifically proven to:

- Lower stress hormones (cortisol)
- Reduce anxiety and depression
- Improve focus and emotional regulation
- Help you sleep better
- Give you a sense of control when everything feels chaotic

For those in hoarded homes specifically:

- Creates mental space when physical space is limited
- Gives you a tool you can use anywhere, anytime
- Helps process difficult emotions without being overwhelmed by them
- Provides a sense of calm you can return to
- Builds resilience for handling ongoing stress

Meditation IS about:

- Noticing your thoughts without getting stuck in them
- Returning to the present moment
- Creating space between you and your stress
- Practicing being kind to yourself

Meditation ISN'T about:

- Emptying your mind completely (that's nearly impossible)
 - Being perfectly still or quiet
 - Achieving some enlightened state
 - Never having thoughts
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Before You Start: Setting Yourself Up

Where to meditate:

- Your calm corner (if you have one)
- Your bed
- Sitting on the floor
- In your car
- Outside (park, porch, backyard)
- Bathroom (if it's the only private space)
- Anywhere you can have a few minutes

You don't need silence. You can meditate with:

- Household noise in the background
- Headphones playing calming music or white noise
- People talking in other rooms
- Traffic sounds outside

Position:

- Sitting (chair, floor, bed)
- Lying down (if you won't fall asleep—though that's okay too)
- Standing (if sitting isn't comfortable)
- Whatever position your body can sustain comfortably

If you have physical limitations:

- Use pillows for support
- Lie down instead of sitting
- Do shorter sessions
- Adjust any instructions to fit your body's needs

Technique 1: Breath Focus (Simplest)

Best for: Beginners, or when you need quick relief in high-stress situations

Time: 2-5 minutes

How to do it:

- Get comfortable. Sit or lie down. Close your eyes if that feels okay, or keep them open with a soft gaze downward.
- Breathe normally. Don't try to change your breath yet—just notice it.
- Count your breaths:
 - Breathe in: Count “1”
 - Breathe out: Count “2”
 - Breathe in: Count “3”
 - Continue up to 10, then start over at 1
- When your mind wanders (and it will):
- Notice the thought without judgment
- Say to yourself: “thinking”
- Return to counting your breaths
- Continue for your chosen time. Even 2 minutes counts.

Why this works: Counting gives your mind something to do, which makes it easier than trying to “think of nothing.”

Technique 2: Body Scan

Best for: Releasing physical tension, grounding when anxious, before sleep

Time: 5-15 minutes

How to do it:

- Lie down or sit comfortably. Close your eyes if comfortable.
- Start at your toes. Notice how they feel. Are they tense? Relaxed? Warm? Cold? Don't judge—just notice.
- Move slowly up your body:
 - Feet → Ankles → Calves → Knees → Thighs
 - Hips → Stomach → Chest → Back
 - Shoulders → Arms → Hands → Fingers
 - Neck → Face → Head
- For each body part:
 - Notice any tension or discomfort
 - Breathe into that area
 - Imagine the tension releasing on the exhale

- Move to the next area
- When your mind wanders, gently bring attention back to your body.

Why this works: Focusing on physical sensations pulls you out of anxious thoughts and into the present moment.

Modifications:

- If lying down is triggering, sit instead
- If certain body parts hold trauma, skip them
- Do a shorter version: just feet, belly, and shoulders
- Reverse direction: start at head, move down to toes

Technique 3: Guided Meditation

Best for: When you need external structure, can't focus alone, prefer listening

Time: 5-20 minutes (depends on recording)

How to do it:

- Find a guided meditation. Free options:
 - **YouTube:** Search “guided meditation for anxiety/stress/teens”
 - **Apps:** Insight Timer (many free), Headspace (some free), Calm (some free)
 - **Spotify/Apple Music:** Guided meditation playlists
- Use headphones or ear buds if household noise is an issue.
- Follow the voice. The guide will tell you what to focus on—breathing, body sensations, visualization, etc.
- Don't worry about doing it “right.” If your mind wanders, that's normal. The guide will help redirect you.
- These can be super helpful at night when you can't shut your brain down to sleep

Why this works: Having someone else lead removes the pressure of figuring out what to do. You just follow along.

What to look for in guided meditations:

- Calming voice (you'll know within 30 seconds if it works for you)
- Appropriate length (start with 5-10 minutes)
- Content that resonates (anxiety relief, sleep, stress, grounding, etc.)

Technique 4: Mantra Meditation

Best for: Racing thoughts, anxiety, when you need an anchor

Time: 3-10 minutes

How to do it:

- Choose a word or short phrase that feels calming or grounding:
 - “Peace”
 - “Calm”
 - “Breathe”
 - “I am safe”
 - “This is temporary”
 - “Let go”
- Use an affirmation from the Affirmations exercise
- Get comfortable. Close your eyes if that feels right.
- Repeat your mantra silently or out loud:
 - On each inhale, say it in your mind
 - On each exhale, repeat it
 - Or say it continuously at whatever pace feels natural
- When your mind wanders, return to the mantra. The mantra is your anchor.
- Continue for your chosen time.

Why this works: Repeating a word or phrase gives your anxious mind something to hold onto instead of spiraling.

Technique 5: Visualization

Best for: Escaping mentally from your environment, creating positive feelings

Time: 5-15 minutes

How to do it:

- Get comfortable. Close your eyes.
- Imagine a place that feels safe and peaceful to you:
 - A beach
 - A forest
 - A calm bedroom (like your future home from the Vision Board)
 - Floating in space
 - Anywhere that feels good

- Make it detailed:
 - What do you see? (Colors, light, objects)
 - What do you hear? (Waves, birds, silence)
 - What do you smell? (Salt air, pine, fresh laundry)
 - What do you feel? (Warmth, softness, breeze)
- Stay in this place for as long as you want. Explore it. Notice details.
- When ready to finish, take a deep breath and slowly open your eyes.

Why this works: Your brain responds to visualization similarly to real experiences, creating actual feelings of calm and safety.

Technique 6: Mindful Observation

Best for: When traditional meditation feels too hard, need to stay present

Time: 3-10 minutes

How to do it:

- Find something to observe:
 - A candle flame
 - Clouds moving
 - A plant
 - Your pet
 - Water flowing
 - Rain on a window
- Watch it closely without judgment or analysis. Just observe:
 - Movement
 - Colors
 - Changes
 - Details you've never noticed
- When your mind wanders, return to observing.
- That's it. Just watch and notice.

Why this works: Focusing externally can be easier than focusing internally, and still creates the meditative state.

Technique 7: Movement Meditation

Best for: When sitting still is too hard, have physical energy to release

Time: 5-15 minutes

How to do it:

- Walking meditation:
 - Walk slowly (indoor or outdoor)
 - Notice each step: heel down, toe up, weight shifting
 - Feel your feet on the ground
 - When mind wanders, return to the sensation of walking
- Gentle movement:
 - Stretch slowly
 - Notice how each movement feels
 - Focus on the sensation in your muscles
 - Breathe with each movement

Why this works: Movement can be meditative when done mindfully and slowly.

Creating Your Meditation Practice

Use this with the Energy Check-In: If you're at 6-8 points, try a 2-minute practice. If you're at 12+ points, you can do longer sessions.

Start small:

- 2-3 minutes is enough when you're beginning
- Do it once and see how it feels
- Gradually increase time as it gets easier

Try different techniques:

- You don't have to stick with one
- Different techniques work for different moods
- What works today might not work tomorrow—that's okay

Make it a routine (if possible):

- Same time each day (morning, before bed, after school)
- Same location (your calm corner, bed, etc.)
- Pair it with another habit (after brushing teeth, before homework)

Track what works:

- Which technique helped most?
- What time of day works best?
- How do you feel before vs. after?

Be realistic:

- Some days you'll meditate, some days you won't
- Some sessions will feel great, some will feel useless
- That's normal—keep trying

When Meditation Feels Hard**“My mind won't stop racing”**

- That's normal. The goal isn't to stop thoughts, just notice them
- Try mantra meditation or guided meditation for more structure
- Keep sessions short (2-3 minutes)

“I can't sit still”

- Try movement meditation
- Or do a body scan lying down
- Or walk while breathing mindfully

“I don't have a quiet space”

- Use headphones with calming music or white noise
- Practice mindful observation instead
- Embrace the noise as part of the practice

“I fall asleep”

- If you need sleep, that's okay—you probably needed it
- Try meditating sitting up instead of lying down
- Do it earlier in the day when you're more alert

“It feels pointless/nothing happens”

- Benefits are cumulative—you might not feel it after one session
- Even if you don't “feel” anything, your nervous system is benefiting
- Try for a week before deciding it doesn't work

“I feel more anxious during meditation”

- This can happen when you're used to avoiding feelings
- Try shorter sessions
- Try techniques that focus externally (mindful observation)
- Consider whether you need to talk to someone about what's coming up

“My thoughts are too painful”

- You don't have to meditate on painful things
- Use visualization to go somewhere pleasant
- Try movement meditation to stay in your body
- Consider talking to a counselor if thoughts are overwhelming

Accessibility Considerations

Meditation can be adapted to any ability level. If sitting is uncomfortable, lie down or use support pillows. If focusing is difficult due to ADHD or executive function challenges, try guided meditations or very short sessions (1-2 minutes). If anxiety makes sitting still feel intolerable, try movement meditation or walking. If trauma makes closing your eyes triggering, keep them open with a soft downward gaze. If auditory processing is difficult, try visual meditation (candle gazing, clouds) or body-based techniques. There's no "right" way to meditate—adapt any technique to what your body and brain need.

Important Reminders

- **Meditation is not a cure.** It's a tool for managing stress, not eliminating your situation.
- **You can't meditate your way out of a hoarded home.** But you can use meditation to cope while you're in it.
- **There's no "good" or "bad" at meditation.** If you sat for 2 minutes and your mind wandered the whole time, you still meditated.
- **Benefits build over time.** Don't expect instant calm. Consistent practice (even just a few times a week) creates change.
- **It's okay if meditation isn't for you.** Not every tool works for everyone. Try it genuinely, and if it doesn't help, move on to other coping strategies.
- **You deserve peace, even if your environment is chaotic.** Meditation is one way to create internal peace when external peace isn't possible.

Real Talk

Meditation probably sounds kind of woo-woo, especially when your immediate problem is a house full of clutter and a parent who won't change.

"Just breathe" feels useless when you can't walk through your house without tripping over stuff.

And yet—meditation works.

Not because it fixes anything external. But because it gives you a tool for managing your internal response to an impossible external situation.

Living in a hoarded home means your nervous system is constantly activated. You're always on alert, always stressed, always overwhelmed. Your body never fully relaxes because your environment never feels safe.

Meditation interrupts that cycle.

It gives you moments—even just two or three minutes—where your nervous system can reset. Where your brain can experience calm. Where you remember what peace feels like.

That matters.

Because when you're constantly stressed, you forget what calm feels like. You forget that your default setting doesn't have to be "overwhelmed." Meditation reminds you.

It's not a solution. It's survival.

It's a way to stay sane while you're waiting to get out. It's a way to create internal refuge when external refuge isn't available.

Try it. Even if it feels silly. Even if you're skeptical.

Two minutes of breathing while counting to ten.

That's all.

See what happens.**You might be surprised.**