

Posture

The Buddha said meditation flows through all four postures; sitting; walking; standing; and lying down, and in the transitions between them. The sage Patanjali defined good meditation posture as when body-heart-mind can be relatively still and steady.

Meditation is not limited to any particular posture, and each of the four postures have a unique flavour and effect on our heart-mind. So we encourage you to explore them all. It probably will not express the wisest and kindest relationship to the body, heart and mind to use the same position in every session. 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.

For the sake of steadying, calming, and expanding the range of possibilities, it is usually better to stay in one posture for the duration of a session. Try to get as comfortable, relaxed, and still as you can, yet also notice that any vision of a perfect posture is possibly only possible in the imagination. If you need to move during a session do so with presence and a sense that this too is part of the meditation.

We encourage a sense that the body is the nearest other we can get to know. The body is not ours, maybe it is nature's gift to us, we are stewards with a duty of care for the body. So with profound kind acceptance of body and mind as they are appearing in this moment, explore how to develop as much ease and stillness as we can.

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. Here we are looking for a balance of stability we can relax into, and an uprightness bringing an alive energy.

If sitting on cushions or a chair experiment to find the best height. Rest your hands comfortably on your knees or lap. Try both (and when hands are on knees explore palm up and down), notice the difference on the shoulders, the uprightness of the posture, and the energy in the system.

Relax your shoulders, then lift and roll them back, then release them down and back, opening your chest area. 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 feels aligned, supported and straight. Angling the cushion or the seat of the chair can help your hips to tilt forward. Explore leaning forwards and backwards looking for the centre point. Then relax into the posture fully.

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. Making the back of the chair higher than the front allows your hips to naturally roll forward, opening the abdomen. This also keeps the front edge of the chair from cutting off circulation through the backs of the legs.

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, legs, ankles...

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 asymmetrical positions (everything except sitting in a chair or Japanese Style) reduce back pain by alternating legs every other sittings: if the left leg is in front in one sitting, then have the right leg in front in the next sitting.

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. Eventually we can also invite other contemplations like mettā.

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. It also resonates with the intentional energy of standing up for something.

Choose a flat, stable, and quiet place. Standing near a tree offers inspiration and support. Place your feet shoulder width apart. Either let your arms hang by your side, or together at the waist. Your eyes can be closed; the attention entirely within, or open; the gaze soft and unfocused. 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.

As with the sitting posture: 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. Feel into your posture. Is it flexible, relaxed and open, while also steady, stable, and upright?

You may wish to tune into your breath, the contact of the feet on the earth, the whole body standing, or with the standing posture itself: showing up for life in life, like a tree.

Reclining Posture

For many people, lying down is the position most suitable for being relaxed, open and still. Reclining can express a lessening of resistance to, or trying to control life.

If possible, lie on a soft but firm surface. Invite the body into a comfortable awake position, so preferably not one you habitually or are likely to fall asleep in. Having the knees raised or a hand in the air can encourage the sense this is not bedtime.

Lying on the Back ~ To support the lower back it helps to raise the knees or lower legs, with cushions or folded blankets. For a straighter spine rather than placing a pillow under the head try putting one under the neck or without one altogether.

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.