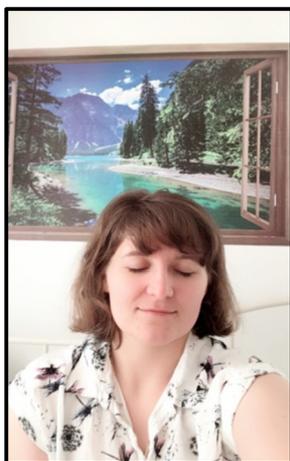


# Welcome to the world of meditation

By Chloe Halstead

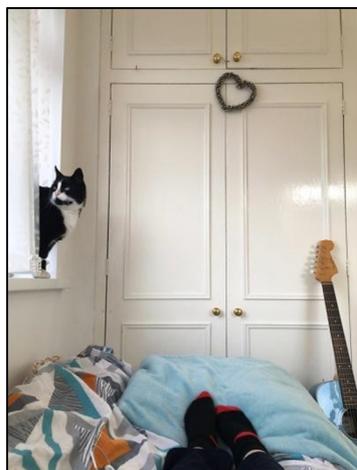
You're lying in bed, too weak to draw or read but you have one wonderful thing. Your imagination. When you've finished reading this article you will know how to travel the globe and experience the world outside, all from inside your own mind.

It may seem a daunting process, sitting down, not thinking of anything, but the wonder of meditation is that it's not necessarily about not thinking. Some of them are, but for those of you like me who have their mind buzzing 24 hours even when you're feeling really ill, guided meditation may be what you need to calm your mind for so many minutes a day and take you to that calm place where the world is just put on hold. I can't stress it enough and I'll be honest, when I was a child and was ill with M.E my mind would not let me rest.



The thought of meditating was like torture I fought so much against it. Fast forward to now and I was doing so well, too well and fell back into the grips of a relapse. I was advised to start meditating for at least half an hour twice a day. I was so ill at this point I didn't expect much. But it was amazing. Since March I have meditated twice and sometimes three times a day and for the first time in my life I'm not booming and busting! Allowing my body to heal in this time has helped me find my baseline and the other day I managed to see someone (accidentally) for two hours and was ok.

## What do I need to meditate?



The great thing is, you don't need much. You can meditate in your bedroom, in the car, even before something stressful like a doctor's appointment. All you need is a nice quiet place to relax (so send Dad's washing up kitchen band away). You could make a little meditation nook. Maybe pile up some cushions (I'm working on asking Mum for an indoor teepee) have a cosy blanket and draw the curtains. Tell people you are going to meditate so they won't disturb you.

Find a nice nook where you won't be disturbed (even by howling cats)

## How do I start?

Either sit or lie down and just start with gentle breathing. In through the nose, feel your stomach expand like a balloon, hold it for three seconds, really notice that pause, how it calms everything, and then slowly breathe out, almost in slow motion. You can choose the length of the breath, just find what makes you feel relaxed but it's good to have the last breath longer than the first. You'll feel your body start to relax. One tip I learned was to tense each muscle in turn then relax and feel the wonderful difference. But if it's painful for you don't worry. The breathing is the most important. This is how most meditations start and without it I just don't feel relaxed enough.

Now you can either work with

### 1 - Silence

### 2 - Guided Meditation

### 3 - Gentle music

1 - Silence - Of course there rarely is silence but as quiet as you can get. Use the sounds around you to your advantage. Hear them, focus on them, but instead of reacting or thinking about them just let them wash over you like a gentle breath of air. People can think meditation is about not thinking of anything, but that's impossible. I dare you to think of nothing. See you're thinking! :) You're thinking about not being able to just think of nothing. Just like the sound let the thoughts come and go, like leaves on a river. Don't rush after them or fish them from the water. Just accept them and see them go. Even if the thought is a worry and it begs you to look at it, just watch it go by. You are in charge here. This is your time. You may find that you grab onto a thought before you realise and when you do just return to your breathing, put the leaf back in the river and watch it wash away. Keep this calm breathing for as long as you feel. They say half an hour is the best most effective time but start easily, even five minutes a day will help.



My meditation buddy Chris Rushton says 'Meditation is about stopping and just being in the present. By being mindful and meditating we become more aware of thought patterns and emotions, we don't need to judge or get rid of them, nor actively relax, just observe them and realise that they come and go moment to moment. We can concentrate on the breath to anchor us as it's always part of the present.'

2 - Guided meditations. These are meditations that you can listen to on YouTube, on apps, there are so many to choose from. They take you on a journey to beautiful destinations. You walk around, imagining the grass crunching under your feet, the sound of sweet bird song.

My top tip is to really focus on the five senses. You'll be amazed how real it feels.

There are even ones that focus on different emotions, healing the inner child (Honest Guys) working with fear, pain, anger, forgiveness.

3 - Music. This, ironically, is similar to the silent meditation. Just allow the sounds to wash over you, breathe and let your mind be in this calm place.

There are so many guided meditations, body scans and mindful music available and it can be quite daunting knowing which to choose so here are my personal favourites and the ones which have benefited me so greatly.

## GUIDED MEDITATIONS

1 - The Honest Guys. Without them I'd still feel lost in my buzzing mind. Their meditations are nothing short of magical. They're interesting, wonderful and transport you to so many places. You can spend ten minutes on a sandy beach, wander through an enchanted forest and for fellow Hobbits out there you can visit Middle Earth, walk with the elves, visit a magic wishing pool and even fly on a dragon. You can find them on YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/user/TheHonestGuys>

2 - Headspace. I couldn't believe the difference Headspace made to me. It's an app you download on your phone or tablet, you do ten minutes a day putting what you learn into practise. It teaches you to calm the mind, to get rid of nagging thoughts and gives you a fresh perspective on life. <https://www.headspace.com>

3 - Jason Stephenson. I always always fall asleep when I listen to these meditations. They are so relaxing and soothing. The crystal forest, the enchanted cave. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqPYhcdFqrlUXiGmPRAej1w>



Obviously this cat subject has fallen asleep

**TOP TIP** - Meditation isn't sleeping but it's very easy to fall asleep in the meditative space. Imagine it in three layers. there's being awake and sleep and right in the middle just hovering on the edge of sleep is meditation. If you fall asleep that's fine but why not set a gentle alarm for forty minutes so you don't sleep for ages and disrupt your sleep at night.

How you meditate is completely up to you. Have fun with it and breathe. Ommm.



Warning. Is it not advised to meditate up a tree.