





ZEN FOR MEN

Feel like you're going to pieces? Here's how to pull yourself together.

BY MICHAEL EASTER / PHOTOGRAPHS BY HENRY LEUTWYLER



T

THE MEN IN MY FAMILY HAVE A HISTORY OF ACTING ON IMPULSE. MY FATHER ONCE GOT DRUNK ON ST. PATRICK'S DAY, PAINTED HIS HORSE GREEN, AND RODE BAREBACK INTO A HONKY TONK WITH A WOMAN WHO WASN'T MY MOTHER. HIS BOOZE-FUELED BENT FOR B.S. AND MAYHEM CAME FROM MY GRANDFATHER, WHO I'M TOLD WAS THE MOST CHARMING SOT, LIAR, AND CHEAT IN ADA COUNTY, IDAHO.

LIKE MY DARK FEATURES AND LONG NOSE, MY PENCHANT FOR RECKLESSNESS AND REVELRY IS PROBABLY GENETIC. AND I WAS STARTING TO RIDE THAT SAME HORSE. BUT AFTER A "DUDE, WHERE'S MY CAR?" SCENE TWO YEARS AGO, I SWORE OFF MY FAMILY'S FAVORITE FORM OF FOAMY ESCAPISM AND WENT SEARCHING FOR HIGHER RELIEF.

THEN THE NEXT QUESTION: HOW COULD I REALLY CHANGE? COULD I GIVE UP THE HARMFUL STUFF BUT ALSO GAIN SOMETHING BACK IN THE BARGAIN? MEDITATION PIQUED MY INTEREST BECAUSE ITS PROMISE WAS SO SIMPLE AND YET SO OUT OF MY REACH: PEACE OF MIND. I READ UP ON THE PRACTICE AND GOT STARTED.



I sat on the edge of my bed, eyes closed, breathing deeply, trying to go blank. I was a mess. My thoughts bounced around like a puppy on speed. I plotted how I could finagle a raise at work and win an argument I was having with my girlfriend. I wondered how I'd handle weekends and college reunions without booze and bedlam. Then something significant happened: I started to notice the tumult that my self-important, future-focused thinking brought on.

When my thoughts run the show and I do the first thing that comes to mind, I have the mental finesse of a brakeless freight train. I become the guy who treats his work commute like Daytona. I fire off regrettable emails that open with "WTF." And I huffily tug on my dog's leash when he stops to smell something for too long because, hey, I have shit to do and you sniff this same street sign every morning, buddy.

By returning each day to the edge of my bed to sit, breathe, focus on nothing, and pull back to nothing when I recognize that my mind has wandered, I've come to realize that impulses, thoughts, and emotions are like clouds floating across the blue sky: temporary. I don't have to act on them, nor do I have to believe them.

About a year ago I was driving and listening to someone on a podcast explaining that if you take all of time that we know of and put it on a yearlong scale—called the cosmic calendar—all of recorded history shows up on December 31 at about 11:59 p.m. When I heard that, I truly realized how insignificant I am in the grand scheme. I lost it. Imagine a 29-year-old fitness bro bawling his eyes out in commuter traffic while passing a Chipotle and an Office Depot.

Then it occurred to me: Can I change time? No. Would freaking out about the meaning of life and what happens next do me any good? No. Didn't I thoroughly enjoy my life and have a lot to be grateful for? Yes. I was sitting in a V8-powered, air-conditioned, half-ton pickup that was streaming audible information from outer freaking space, and I was headed to a job I love where I help men better their lives.

It's a hell of a time to be a man, and I'm grateful for every single lucky moment. There's freedom in that. I may not be significant from a cosmic standpoint, but I can matter on a smaller scale by caring less about myself and more about others.

Now at work I hear statements like "You're better than me at this. What do you think?" and "Sorry, my fault. I'll fix it," coming out of my mouth. When someone rushes into my office with a "big problem," I understand that it's not a big deal (it never is) and calmly solve it. At home, my girlfriend and I don't bicker because I now know my way isn't "the way"; it's "a way." And I wait until my dog is done sniffing urine-soaked objects before continuing our walk.

My guess is that a lot of men are where I used to be. It's the 21st century. We're distracted, edgy, rattled, stressed, scattered, and overwhelmed. We're tense and jangled even when we're in a relaxed setting. We react to the pings, buzzes, and flashing lights on our cellphones while we're at home with family, out golfing with friends, even hanging out alone. We fret about the next thing before we're done with this thing.

The irony is that there have never been more or better researched ways for silencing stress, creating peace of mind, and living in the now. Meditation helped me, but I know it's not for everyone. Through it, I've realized mental repose has many faces: focusing on the metronomic cast of my fly rod, watching my pointer flush out a bird, detaching from fatigue on a long run.

Our fathers might be right. Maybe walking in the woods, tinkering on a vintage Chevy, or sipping a cold lemonade on the porch as we watch traffic go by is all we need. Maybe the answer isn't trying to find nirvana, but realizing that nirvana can be right here if we discover ways to engage our brains differently and focus on the moment, even when we're brushing our teeth.

But how do you get from here (tense, frazzled, reactionary) to there (calm, present, patient)? Here's your guide to creating space for yourself so you can live the life you've imagined—while you still have time.



DON'T JUST DO SOMETHING; SIT THERE

Your path to enlightenment (or at least a slightly less dark view of the world) starts with this

simple six-step meditation plan.

1/ Sit with Your Eyes Closed

You don't need a monastery, just a spot with minimal distractions. The point is to practice tuning out intrusions.

▼
Moment's notice:
By learning to
stay in the present,
you can create
a peaceful future.

2/ Focus on Your Breath

Take several slow inhalations, exhaling completely after each one.

3/ Quiet Your Brain

“Imagine your mind as a clear, calm, blue sky,” says Tim Olson, a North Face athlete and two-time winner of the 100-mile Western States Endurance Run. Sometimes a cluster of storm clouds will obscure that blue sky, but the sky is always there. Allow your breath to take you to a less turbulent place.

4/ Do a Body Scan

Take stock: How are you feeling at this moment in time? Where in your body do you feel clenched? Where do you feel light? Don't try to change anything you observe. Just recognize it.

5/ Suspend Judgment

“It's okay if you're having a stressful day,” says Olson. Try to pay attention to the way you're feeling without becoming discouraged. Whenever your mind wanders, bring it back to your breath—again and again.

6/ Build Endurance

Start with five minutes, and be patient. Then work up to 10, 20, and 30. “Meditation is exercise for your brain,” Olson says. “The more you do it, the easier it becomes.”



THE FIVE-MINUTE VACATION

You don't need a beach in Belize to escape your problems. These three tricks stop stress faster than a mai tai.

► **Sniff This** Mix a drop of eucalyptus oil with 19 drops of almond oil. Then place a few drops of the formula on a cotton square and enjoy the aroma for five minutes. In a recent study from Korea, people who did this saw their anxiety levels dip. That may be because a compound in eucalyptus called 1,8-cineole reduces blood pressure and relaxes muscles. Put that cotton square in your car's cup holder to take some of the rush out of rush hour.

► **Go Row** Is the boss treating you like a urinal cake? Get thee to a rowing machine. Just five minutes on the erg can ease feelings of aggression caused by criticism more than hitting a punching bag will, according to German research. Rowing at a moderate 7 mph can relax your muscles in a way that counteracts the tension induced by anger.

► **Eat Chocolate** Men who ate 1.8 ounces of dark chocolate two hours before a stressful task developed less inflammation than those who munched a placebo chocolate, a study in the journal *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity* found. Credit the antioxidants. The chocolate was 72 percent strength—like Ghirardelli Intense Dark Twilight Delight.

MEN ON A MISSION

Andrew Puddicombe

IF YOU WANT A PIECE OF THE ACTION, FIRST FIND PEACE IN THE ACTION. FOUR GUYS SHOW US HOW.

Icons by MICHAEL BRANDON MYERS



Andy Puddicombe, 43, of Santa Monica, California, is a former Buddhist monk, the cofounder of Headspace (the world's largest meditation app, with nearly 10 million users), and author of The Headspace Guide to Meditation and Mindfulness.

Before I became a monk I was living in London, where I was studying sports science and working as a personal trainer.

I was at a rugby club, and a car crashed into the crowd. I was on the outside of it. It was really bad. A couple of people died and others had serious injuries. Three months later, my step-sister was hit and killed on her bicycle by a man who fell asleep at the wheel. It really shook me, and not all in a bad way; it woke me up.

I was living a life I was kind of enjoying, but I didn't feel at peace. So halfway through my degree, I quit to become a monk.

People were horrified. My university thought I'd gone mad and wanted me to see a doctor; my parents were like "What is he doing?" My girlfriend was like "How dare you?"

Understandable. I would have been asking the same questions. I was 22 years old.

I studied the Burmese tradition for five years, then spent another five years in the Tibetan tradition. I lived in Nepal, Thailand, India, Burma, Russia, Poland, and Australia. I spent some time in monastery and some in retreat, a mix of time spent meditating for hours a day and mindfulness training, like cleaning.

CONTINUED ON P. 138



ANYWHERE YOGA

You can enjoy the benefits of yoga all day long. Just do these simple moves.

- ▶ **Waking Up** While lying on your back in bed, bend both knees until your soles are flat on the mattress. Put your arms out in a T and slowly drop both knees from side to side. As your knees go left, look right, and vice versa. Goodbye, cranky lower back.
- ▶ **Commuting** Sit up straight and put your hands on the wheel at 10 and 2 (where they're supposed to be anyway). Slowly tilt the front of your pelvis down, creating a space between your lower back and the car seat.

Then slowly tilt your pelvis up, pressing your lower back into the seat to release pressure.

- ▶ **At the Office** Stand with your feet together and slowly bend forward. (Your knees can be bent or straight.) Let your head, neck, and arms go slack as you breathe for 10 to 20 seconds. Slowly return to an upright stance. Inversions help refresh your brain by sending more blood there.
- ▶ **Before Exercising** Warm up the muscles in your arms, back, and legs by doing the downward-facing dog. From a forward bend (see "Office," above), bend both knees until your palms touch the floor; then step back into an inverted V position. Extend through both

arms while lifting your hips, shifting your weight back, and moving your heels toward the ground. Hold for 10 seconds, come down to your knees for 10 seconds, and repeat.

- ▶ **During/After a Flight** While standing, clasp both forearms behind your back and bend gently backward. This opens up the chest, shoulders, and back.
- ▶ **Before Bed** Sit on the floor facing a wall. Lie back and scooch your butt toward the wall while raising your legs. Rest the backs of your legs against the wall, either together with the soles of your feet toward the ceiling or in an open V shape. Breathe and rest until you feel relaxed.

5 APPS THAT WORK ALMOST AS WELL AS A NAP



Calm

Spend a week to three weeks perfecting a stress-busting technique (think of it as "strain training") or use its "Emergency Calm" to decompress while waiting for the traffic to decongest.



Headspace For Sport

Programs such as "training," "competition," "motivation," and "focus" last 10 to 20 minutes. If your mind tends to get in the way of peak performance, this app may be just the thing.



Buddify

This app offers specific meditations for dealing with stressful situations, including travel hell and lying in bed in the middle of the night while thinking about everything you have to do.



Take a Break!

It supplies quick relaxation breaks you can use at work. For example, stare at a virtual horizon and select a seven- to 13-minute guided meditation set to relaxing sounds such as waves or rain.



Stop, Breathe & Think

Take a survey to gauge your mood and customize a meditation program to address it. It offers plenty of functions, including the ability to track progress and emotions.



WHAT I'VE
LEARNED

Find Calm amid the Chaos



7 WORDS THAT FIXED EVERYTHING

When conventional medicine failed him, cancer survivor and former broadcast journalist Brad Willis started meditating.

You might remember Willis, 67, as an intrepid foreign correspondent with NBC News. But here's the rest of the story: He broke his back while on vacation, endured a failed surgery that ended his career, and then received a diagnosis of stage IV throat cancer. "At first I relied on Western medicine," he says, "painkillers, muscle relaxers, [and] antidepressants, which when added to the alcohol I was drinking only deepened my despair. It wasn't until I discovered yoga that my healing began."

Willis admits that he still sometimes gets agitated as a result of old patterns and living in a fast-paced, overstimulated world. "But that's when meditation and the silent repetition of positive thoughts is a godsend," he says. "It's very powerful just to sit and repeat silent phrases such as, 'I am peaceful, compassionate, healed, and whole.'"

Skeptical? "Start with just two to three minutes each day to develop a positive habit," says Willis.



THE STILL POINT IN ALL MOTION

When things get rocky, world-class climber Chris Sharma takes his mental focus to new heights.

Sharma might be the most daring and successful rock climber in the world. But the 35-year-old Californian credits the sport with keeping him fit physically and mentally.

"Climbing is the best form of meditation," he says. "It's all about body awareness. You're in touch with every little nuance in your body. One of the beautiful things about climbing is that you can push out your everyday worries and be present."

Sharma tried formal meditation but found that it wasn't for him. "When you're sitting and just focusing on your breath, there's so much potential for your thoughts to drift." Climbing, though, allows him to get a grip on his monkey mind and find focus and balance. And that's vital when you're scaling the cliffs of Majorca, 70 feet up with no rope.

Even if you're not this adventurous, Sharma suggests finding a passion that absorbs your attention. "It's about finding moments of focus and concentration," he says.



THE SOUNDTRACK OF PRESENCE

Here's how the music mogul and philanthropist Russell Simmons gets his groove on.

Simmons, who's the chairman and CEO of Rush Communications and cofounder of DefJam Records, meditates twice a day. "Nothing creative happens except in the present moment," he says. "Only a quiet mind can create."

The 59-year-old also does yoga every day and is opening a studio (Tantris) on Sunset Boulevard. When he practices, he blends the physical moves with a meditating mind—the breath being the element that unites them.

Yoga, says Simmons, is much greater than the physical practice most people experience. "People go to a yoga class in the gym and think it's yoga, but that's just poses," he explains. "When the mind is still, that's yoga."

When you're in this mindset, Simmons contends, you're better able to conquer any of life's stressors. "I don't believe that what's on the outside is the cause of stress. The cause of stress is on the inside. A calm mind can go through all sorts of things and be happy."



FAST TO SLOW DOWN

Fasting doesn't have to involve food. Depriving yourself of certain things can give you space from ingrained habits so you can reboot your brain.

Try these fasts to raise awareness and calm your mind.

► **Sight Fasting** Sure, you spend all night with your eyes closed. But watching your eyelids for an hour or so during the day can change the way you experience the world. Your eyes function like a computer keyboard while your brain is the processor that interprets the input, says Lotfi Merabet, O.D., Ph.D., of Harvard's Laboratory for Visual Neuroplasticity.

If you temporarily reduce the demands on your brain's visual cortex by shutting down your sight, you can redeploy those brain cells for other things. Most often they go to work to heighten one of your other senses, which is why some blind people have seemingly superhuman hearing abilities, a keener sense of smell, or an enhanced capacity for taste. To get this effect, you must spend time with your eyes closed, but you don't have to sit in silence. Instead, try this: Put on your favorite Spotify playlist or podcast and close your eyes while you listen "to prepare the brain to be more receptive," says Merabet.

► **Sound Fasting** There's a reason the words "peace" and "quiet" go together so often. Silence helps promote

CONTINUED ON P. 138

I understand why people are put off by the trappings of meditation. I was quite literally a guy with a shaved head who wore a purple skirt and burned incense.

After 10 years I went back to the U.K. and met a doctor who ran an integrated practice. I was taken into the practice to teach mindfulness alongside traditional medicine. It gave me a chance to see which techniques worked. That's where I met Rich Pierson, a burned-out exec in his late 20s. We ran meditation events together for two years. People started asking us, "Why can't I get anything like this online?" I didn't think it could work. I believed that meditation was a very personal, one-to-one thing, and I didn't know how it could work online at this scale. But Rich did, and together we launched Headspace in 2010.

Some see meditation as a little "woo-woo," but looking at brain scans, wow, you can actually see the difference it makes, and that's really exciting. We went from 700,000 users in 2014 to 7 million in a year and a half. More than half are men, which is a surprise.

As guys, we struggle. Our minds aren't as compliant, and we don't have the same social networks that women have. We want to appear strong and don't want to admit vulnerability. But meditation is private; you don't have to tell anyone. I am on my own in my own space. As meditation moves to a digital vehicle, it's much easier for guys to use.

Frequency is more important than duration. Five minutes is a good start. Do it anywhere.

There's an important distinction between meditation and mindfulness. Mindfulness is being in the moment in a nonjudgmental way. I'm a passionate surfer. Something about surfing is mindful and naturally brings about that quality of mind. Meditation is taking the time to train our minds so we can apply mindfulness in a more skillful way when we need it.

A lot of people say they don't need meditation, that exercise is their meditation. But what happens when you get injured, or go on holiday, or you can no longer do an activity?

When you are feeling overwhelmed, you can't just leave and go for a run, but you can access the calm you develop from meditation.

There was so much uncertainty when I was diagnosed with testicular cancer in 2013. One day the doctor says I may never be able to have children, and then that it may have spread to my brain. Then he says I'm okay.

Cancer is such a loaded word, but living from one moment to the next takes a lot of the mental anguish out of it. The skill of being present helps when the tendency is to leap forward

hoping for an outcome. Meditation allows us to drop that story line of past and future and just be present.

Men especially are goal-oriented. We tend to be driven toward destination, not aware of the journey. It may sound like a cliché, but the journey is the destination. It only takes cancer or losing your job to understand that we are not as in control as we think we are. It's a scary idea because control makes us feel secure. But instead of desperately trying to hold on to or chase things, meditation opens us up and allows us to flow more easily through everything.

You don't do meditation so you get good at sitting with your eyes closed. You do it to bring awareness and compassion into the world. In the monastery, you have the freedom to be yourself. A lot of the typical male stereotypes fall away, and you're more willing to share feelings and difficulties. You're not so focused on creating a particular identity.

A lot of people assume that monks are enlightened. They are not enlightened; they're working on it. Whenever you bring humans together in a small space, tensions are there. Someone who is type A? In their presence you feel it. And when things get difficult, you want to retreat to a cave. Of course it's different for a monk because you're retreating to an actual cave instead of a metaphorical one.

Sometimes meditation is seen as a magic bullet, that suddenly you can undo 10, 20, even 50 years of conditioning, of living and thinking a certain way. People who dedicate their lives to unwinding the conditioning still do some of the same things, but they're more aware. You may flip someone off in traffic, but by noticing what you've just done you're making progress.

One misunderstanding is that because we talk about being in the moment, we can't have dreams and aspirations. We want to be present, but with a direction. What we don't want is to be so dependent on goals that our happiness depends on reaching them. When our happiness and peace of mind is dependent on an outcome, that's a risky way to live.

In meditation you bring awareness of everything, good and bad. It can make you aware of uncertainty and doubt, and you may realize that you're living in a way that's not leading to your own happiness. That can be scary, but it can result in positive change.

Am I enlightened? Here, enlightenment is seen as a destination. In the East, maintaining stability of awareness and emotion is what you're after, and that takes continuous practice. I consider myself a student of meditation. ■

mindfulness—being in the moment and experiencing the present—by helping your mind rest. The constant noise of our everyday lives keeps our nervous system in a state of chronic overdrive, which plays a role in stress and other health problems. "Our culture has lost the importance of silence," says Patricia Dobkin, Ph.D., an associate professor of medicine at McGill University.

To get comfortable with the quiet, sit for 10 minutes a day "with your breath," which means simply breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth while noticing your body's sensations and letting thoughts come and go. Gradually work up to 20 minutes. Don't be discouraged if your mind seems busy at first. "Many people are uncomfortable with silence," Dobkin says. Your mind may not be still. Your thoughts may buzz around. That's okay; just let the thoughts go and refocus on your breath.

► **Digital Fasting** Phone content can be addicting, especially games like Pokémon Go, which are designed to provide "pleasurable hyperstimulation" that leave you wanting more, says Robert Weiss, M.S.W., a tech expert at Elements Behavioral Health. But smartphones are also necessary for daily communication, so it's probably not wise to go phone-free for days at a time. Try a phone fast during a few strategic hours. Identify scenarios in which technology is an unneeded distraction—meetings, work dinners, or family functions—and turn it off.



HELP YOURSELF TO HAPPINESS

In our selfie-obsessed culture, make selflessness your focus.

Studies show that people who volunteer are healthier and happier than those who don't give back. But not all charity work is equally beneficial. You'll feel best if you volunteer for the right reasons: to bond with other people, understand others' needs, or support a mission you value, suggests research from Australia.

Volunteering to enhance your career, avoid life problems, or get yourself adopted by that sexy director at the animal shelter isn't what this is about. "Start with an organization that you are naturally interested in and feel passionate about," says Sara Konrath, Ph.D., of the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at Indiana University. If you want to help a few of the more than 30 million Americans who can't read, volunteer for a literacy organization. If you're an athlete and want to share your skills with kids, volunteer to be a youth coach. Find local groups sorted by category at volunteermatch.org. ■

WHERE TO BUY

Abercrombie & Fitch abercrombie.com	Farm to Feet farmtofeet.com	Kenneth Cole kennethcole.com	Ruffwear ruffwear.com
Banana Republic bananarepublic.com	Filson filson.com	Michael Kors michaelkors.com	Steven Alan stevenalan.com
Chippewa chippewaboats.com	Hestra hestragloves.com	Moose Knuckles Canada mooseknucklescanada.com	Timberland timberland.com
Coach coach.com	Hilfiger Edition Tommy Hilfiger stores	Naadam naadamcashmere.com	Ugg ugg.com
Dockers dockers.com	J.Crew jcrew.com	Nobis nobis.com	
Eddie Bauer eddiebauer.com	Joseph Abboud josephabboud.com	Patagonia patagonia.com	

MEN'S HEALTH Vol. 32, No. 1 (ISSN 1054-4836), is published 10 times per year (monthly except for January and July) by Rodale Inc., 400 South 10th St., Emmaus, PA 18098-0099; (800) 666-2303. Copyright 2017 by Rodale Inc. All rights reserved. In U.S.: Periodicals postage paid at Emmaus, PA, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster (U.S.): Send address changes to Men's Health magazine, Customer Service, P.O. Box 26299, Lehigh Valley, PA 18002-6299. IN CANADA: Postage paid at Gateway, Mississauga, Ontario; Canada Post International Publication Mail (Canadian Distribution) Sales Agreement No. 40063752. Postmaster (Canada): Send returns and address changes to Men's Health magazine, 2930 14th Avenue, Markham, Ontario, L34 5Z8. (GST# R122988611). Subscribers: If the postal authorities alert us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within 18 months.