

MEDITATION FOR PEOPLE WHO CAN'T SIT STILL

Sitting in silence or repeating a mantra not your thing? Try moving meditations, which help quiet your mind while your body is in motion.

by Barbara Brody

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hen a new wellness studio opened in my town a few months ago, I made a point of lingering near the window whenever I was in the area. I'd catch a glimpse of the tranquil space, which was filled with an array of plush cushions and decorated with succulents, and imagine that I could soak up Zen-like vibes just by peering in. When that (obviously) failed to work, I signed up for a meditation class. And I instantly regretted it.

I forced myself to go to the class, but I quickly confirmed that I'm not the kind of person who can sit still and listen to my breath for 45 minutes. I admit that I should have given it another shot or, perhaps, started with a much shorter session. But after squirming on my cushion and feeling desperate to escape, I had no desire to try again. I decided that meditation just wasn't for me.

After some research, I realized that what I had crossed off my list was only one type of meditation. There are actually hundreds of different ways to meditate, many of which don't entail sitting on the floor with your eyes closed.



“For some, the idea of sitting still in silence or chanting provokes intense anxiety,” says Sage Brody (no relation to the author), a Massachusetts-based dance and movement therapist who often teaches at Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health. While many people assume you have to sit peacefully in lotus position in order to meditate, “anything that gets you in touch with your body and breath and helps to bring unconditional awareness and acceptance is just as valuable,” says Brody.

That’s exactly where moving meditation comes in, and there are many options to choose from. Here’s a look at five that may help you find more peace—no floor cushion required.

1 WALKING MEDITATION

What’s the difference between going for a walk and practicing walking meditation? Intention and focus. With walking meditation, the goal isn’t to reach a destination or see anything specific along the way. The simplest method: Bring your attention to the physical sensation of your foot touching the ground. Really slow down and try to concentrate to the point that you can feel (or imagine feeling) every bone in your foot as it makes contact with the earth, says Brody.

“There’s no special training needed, so it’s completely accessible,” she adds, noting that it’s something you can do

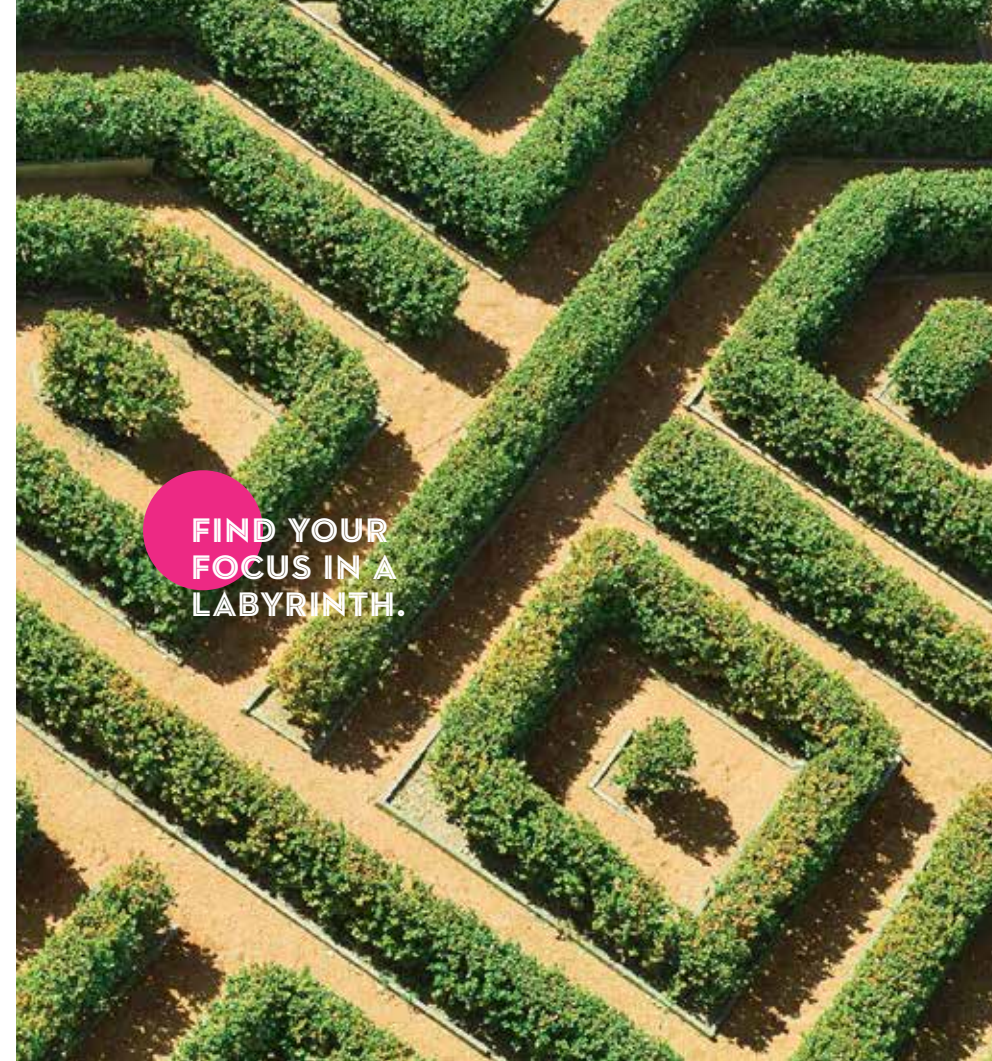
in a beautiful outdoor setting or even in your living room. “Just pay attention, go slow and feel what you feel. And if you suddenly think about what to make for dinner, tell yourself, ‘OK, I had a thought! Now back to my feet.’”

2 FOREST BATHING

Forest bathing, or *shinrin-yoku*, is a traditional Japanese practice that involves immersing yourself in nature. Participants head into the woods and walk very slowly

(think half a mile per hour) while intentionally taking in the sights, sounds and smells of the forest. Spending time amidst evergreens also exposes you to chemicals that are good for the nervous system, says Brody.

Indeed, research has found that many plants and trees give off healthful volatile organic compounds called phytoncides, and studies have found that exposure to these compounds—combined with the meditative benefits of moving mindfully through the woods—has real health benefits. A 2017 research review, published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, found that forest bathers enjoy decreased blood pressure and less inflammation, as well as improved immune system activity.



FIND YOUR FOCUS IN A LABYRINTH.

Quiet a busy mind while moving more.

3 LABYRINTH WALKING

First things first: A labyrinth is not a maze, says Donna Zucker, RN, PhD, professor emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Amherst College of Nursing and a member of The Labyrinth Connection of Western Massachusetts. “It’s not designed to be confusing. It has a one-way entrance to a circuitous path, and the way in is the way out.”

Zucker has led several studies on the practice and has shown that it promotes better mental and physical health (including improved blood pressure) in everyone from college students to convicts serving time. Labyrinths may be constructed from natural settings (like hedges or stones), printed on a tarp that you fold up when you’re done, or even made out of tape.

Before you enter a labyrinth, stand before the entrance for a few minutes, take some deep breaths and consider your intention, says Zucker. “Once you

enter, go at a normal pace and try to coordinate the cadence with your breathing. The twists and turns are gentle reminders that life is not a straight line.”

4 QIGONG

Qi (or chi) refers to the energy or life force within you. There are thousands of types, but “qigong focuses on slow repetition of flowing movements,” Zucker explains. “Even when practitioners work their way up to complicated moves, their bodies just know what to do; they don’t have to keep thinking about what to do next.”

Qigong can be practiced with a group (such as in a class setting) or by yourself. “There are hundreds of videos on YouTube,” says Brody, adding that many are in Chinese but you don’t have to speak the language to understand the moves.

5 DANCE MEDITATION

There are many variations of dance meditation, but

what they all have in common is that they encourage you to get out of your head and dance without thinking about specific steps or what you look like to observers. “It’s about being inspired from the inside and connecting with your spirit as you move,” says Brody, who’s also a certified Shake Your Soul instructor.

In Shake Your Soul, Brody starts by leading participants to give them a dance “vocabulary,” then encourages attendees to do their own thing. While she believes many people can benefit from similar instruction, she says it’s also great if you just want to turn on some music at home that really moves you.

“It’s about being inspired,” she says. “See what happens if you give up what you think you should look like and just focus on the feeling and inspiration coming from inside.”

Barbara Brody is a freelance writer/editor who specializes in health and wellness.



Discover your flow with qigong.