

Meditation doesn't have to be a solo act.



Relax and Recharge!

We've found five everyday moments when you can make time to meditate—without adding yet another thing to your to-do list. *by* SALLY WADYKA

As you know all too well, the job of motherhood can leave you feeling inadequate, anxious, and even occasionally out of your mind. That's exactly why even the briefest of meditative moments can do you a world of good. Taking a few minutes to relax, focus on your breath, and calm your thoughts can help you handle whatever the day (or night) throws at you.

If you've never tried meditating before, it probably sounds intimidating and time-consuming. Even if you used

to practice meditation back in your child-free days, it may now seem impossible to carve out a chunk of time for such a luxury. But it's vital, experts say. "Sitting still and being quiet has profound benefits," says Karen Maezen Miller, author of *Momma Zen: Walking the Crooked Path of Motherhood*. The good news? You don't actually have to sit still or be quiet to harness some of those benefits. "Think of meditation as another way of paying attention," says Miller. "And that can be done almost anywhere, anytime."

ZOE BERKOVIC/GALLERY STOCK

We've made it easy and come up with five scenarios that are already part of your life. To turn them into mini meditation sessions, all you have to do is bring your attention to your breath and repeat the suggested mantra. Think of the mantra as a way of setting an intention, one that may be counter to what you're feeling but that will help you move in that direction. "For example, instead of stressing about what's really going on—the baby's screaming and everything's totally out of control"—set your intention as 'I am peaceful and everything's okay,'" suggests Kelly Roche Sproul, a pre- and post-natal yoga instructor at Yo Mama, in Boulder, Colorado. "Repeat it over and over and you'll start to actually feel it."

There is no right or wrong time to meditate. Since the goal is to make your mind feel relaxed, non-distracted, and yet alert, it can be helpful at any time of day. "In the morning, it will help you start your day refreshed; at night it will help you feel calm and ready for bed," says Miller. "Do it whenever is practical, because if it complicates your life, that's not meditation."

You're taking your child for a walk.

MOMMY MANTRA

"I am grounded."

MEDITATIVE MOMENT

Turn your stroll into a walking meditation by syncing your breathing with your stride. It's helpful to use a phrase that has four syllables ("I am grounded"; "I am breathing"; "I am happy") to merge your breathing and your stride. "Focusing on a positive statement can help you when you're having a bad day, and a phrase that reinforces what you're doing in the moment enhances your awareness and replaces the chatter in your head," says Francine Hoffman, Inner Focus Coordinator at Golden Door Spa in Escondido, California.



Make this a restorative moment.

You're feeding your baby.

MOMMY MANTRA

"I am present."

MEDITATIVE MOMENT

Consider your rocking chair or glider to be your meditation cushion, where you focus exclusively on your baby and your breath. "Instead of thinking about all that you should or could be doing at that moment, allow yourself to rest and be soothed by the rocking and quiet time with your baby," says Miller. Simply start counting your breaths. Then, concentrate on your belly and be conscious of how it rises and falls with each inhalation and exhalation. From there, just

count—*one* as you inhale, *two* as you exhale, *three* as you inhale, and so on. "Even counting to ten will help quiet any distracting thoughts," Miller says. When you get to ten, say your mantra as you breathe out, then start counting again from one.

Your toddler's having a meltdown.

MOMMY MANTRA

"I am patient."

MEDITATIVE MOMENT

"The more chaos there is around you, the more opportunity you have to work on finding some stillness

GRACE HUANG. WARDROBE STYLING BY KAREN KOZLOWSKI FOR KRAMER + KRAMER. PROP STYLING BY STEPHANIE HANES. HAIR AND MAKEUP BY GREGG HUBBARD FOR BERNSTEIN AND ANDRILLI.



Yes! You do know how to chill out!

within,” reasons Roche Sproul. And what better time to apply this theory than the moment when your child is pitching a fit? Give it a shot: Instead of reacting by yelling and getting tense, try to consciously relax the tension seeping into your jaw, neck, and shoulders. Take a deep breath; as you exhale, focus on getting rid of tension. Admittedly, it’s not always easy to pull off, but if you can concentrate on your breath for just ten seconds, it will help you thoughtfully respond rather than automatically react, says Roche Sproul. (Try using the same tactic to deal with a crying baby or kids feuding with one another in the backseat.)

You’re finally alone.

MOMMY MANTRA
“I am restored.”

MEDITATIVE MOMENT

Whether it’s at naptime, in the evening after bedtime, or during a few hours when someone else is in charge, you probably have a lengthy list of everything you plan to accomplish during this window. But this quiet time is also the perfect opportunity for a more traditional meditation session—try grabbing five minutes before you tackle everything else. Find a comfortable place that allows you to sit upright in a supported posture. Close your eyes. As you

inhale, say “And,” then exhale as you count “One,” then inhale and exhale “Two,” continuing up to four. At that point, start over. “Limiting your count to four and then starting over again keeps you alert as well as relaxed, because meditation isn’t about zoning out,” says Hoffman. As thoughts and items from that to-do list cross your mind, acknowledge them, let them go, and return to counting your breaths.

Your child is sleeping through the night—but you’re wide awake.

MOMMY MANTRA
“I am relaxed.”

MEDITATIVE MOMENT

Any mom who’s ever lain awake in the middle of the night knows this vicious cycle all too well: You can’t sleep, your brain is on overdrive, and then you start to watch the clock and panic about how tired you’re going to be if you don’t fall asleep *this second*. “Quieting the noisy mind that torments us is precisely what meditation is for,” explains Miller. Stop looking at the clock and start focusing on your breathing—allowing it to deepen and slow down. Then, visualize that you’re tossing all of the things that are cluttering your brain into a trash can. “As you imagine that you’re filling it up, you’ll empty your mind so you can fall asleep.” 😊

how meditation works

One reason meditation is so powerful is that it can counteract the physiological effects of stress. “Over time, the release of stress hormones like cortisol can increase blood pressure and the risk of heart attack, stroke, and perhaps even certain cancers,” explains Amit Sood, M.D., professor of medicine at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, and author of *The Mayo Clinic Guide to Stress-Free Living*. When you meditate, you

reduce the release of those chemicals and increase the release of endorphins and other feel-good hormones. The result: Your pulse slows, blood pressure decreases, and you’re able to clear your mind. (According to Dr. Sood, most studies testing the effect of meditation on the nervous system have used a minimum of 15 minutes of practice. But a few minutes of deep, relaxed breathing will do you some good too.)

GS/GALLERY STOCK