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4th edition

**by Stephan Bodian**

FOREWORD BY **Dean Ornish, MD**

***Author of Dr. Dean Ornish's Program for Reversing Heart Disease***

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## Meditation For Dummies®, 4th Edition

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# Foreword

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**T**he title of this book is a little misleading because learning to meditate was one of the smartest decisions I ever made.

Meditation is power. Whatever you do, meditation can help you to do it better.

For example, my colleges and I demonstrated, for the first time, that the progression of even severe coronary disease often can be reversed when people go on my program of comprehensive lifestyle changes. Although many people believe that this program is based primarily on diet, meditation is actually an equally important part of it.

So — why meditate?

In *Meditation For Dummies*, 4th Edition, Stephan Bodian helps dispel many of the most common misconceptions about meditation.

<b>Many people view meditation as:</b>	<b>In fact, meditation is:</b>
Boring	Interesting
Esoteric	Familiar
Ascetic	Sensual
Unproductive	Extremely productive
Difficult	Natural
Wimpy	Powerful

Meditation is the practice and process of paying attention and focusing your awareness. When you meditate, a number of desirable things begin to happen — slowly, at first, and deepening over time. As I describe in *Love & Survival*:

First, *when you can focus your awareness, you gain more power.* When you concentrate any form of energy, including mental energy, you gain power. When you focus your mind, you concentrate better. When you concentrate better, you perform better. You can accomplish more, whether in the classroom, in the boardroom, or in the athletic arena. Whatever you do, you can do it more effectively when you meditate. It is for this reason that spiritual teachers and texts often caution that one should begin the practice of meditation only in the context of other spiritual practices and disciplines that help develop compassion and wisdom to use properly this increased power.

Second, *you enjoy your senses more fully.* Although people sometimes view or use meditation as an ascetic experience to *control* their senses, meditation also can *enhance* your senses in ways that are profoundly sensual. Anything that you enjoy — food, sex, music, art, massage, and so on — is greatly enhanced by meditation. When you pay attention to something, it's a lot more enjoyable. Also, you don't need as much of it to get the same degree of pleasure, so you are more likely to enjoy without excess.

When you keep a wall around your heart to armor and protect it from pain, you also diminish your capacity to feel pleasure. When your life is in a continual rush, you may miss exquisite pleasures that exist from moment to moment. Attention spans get shorter. The need for stimulation continually increases just to feel *anything*. Meditation increases awareness and sensitivity; as such, it can be an antidote to numbness and distraction.

Third, *your mind quiets down and you experience an inner sense of peace, joy, and well-being.* When I first learned to meditate and began getting glimpses of inner peace, this experience changed my life. It redefined and reframed my experience. Before, I thought peace of mind came from getting and doing; now, I understand that it comes from *being*. It is our true nature to be peaceful until we disturb it.

This is a radically different concept of where our happiness and our well-being come from. In one of life's great paradoxes, not being aware of this truth, we often end up disturbing our inner peace while striving to get or to do what we think will bring that same peace to us.

Fourth, *you may directly experience and become more aware of the transcendent interconnectedness that already exists.* You may have a direct experience of God or the universal Self, whatever name you give to this experience.

Meditation is simple in concept but difficult to master. Fortunately, you don't have to master meditation to benefit from it. You just have to practice. No one ever really masters it completely, but even a few steps down that road can make a meaningful difference. It is the *process* of meditation that makes it so beneficial, not how well you perform.

In my research studies, most of the participants reported much greater difficulty practicing meditation than exercising or maintaining their diet. Why? You have to eat; it's just a question of what you eat. Meditation, on the other hand, is not part of most people's daily routine or experience. Exercise is more familiar to people, and also there is a macho quality to exercise — you're out there really doing something, whereas meditation still has what some of our research participants at first called the “wimp factor.” From outward appearances, it looks as if you're not doing anything when you meditate. In fact, meditation is a powerful, active process.

There are many different types of meditation. It is found in all cultures and in all religions all over the world — because it works. Truth is truth. Whereas the forms vary, certain principles almost always are found.

This attitude of paying attention can help transform everything we do into a form of meditation. Whatever we do with concentration and awareness becomes meditation.

As the editor of *Yoga Journal* for many years, Stephan Bodian has had the opportunity to become familiar with many different approaches to meditation and yoga. He has distilled the best of these here and gently leads you step by step to discover a form and style of meditation that works best for you.

*Meditation For Dummies*, 4th Edition. Smart. Very smart.

**Dean Ornish, MD**

Founder, President, and Director, Preventive Medicine Research Institute  
Clinical Professor of Medicine, University of California, San Francisco  
Author, *Love & Survival* and *Dr. Dean Ornish's Program for Reversing Heart Disease*

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# Introduction

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Everyone seems to want to know how to meditate these days. From anxious teens to their overwhelmed parents, harried construction workers to hurried executives, retired Baby Boomers to busy Gen Xers and curious Millennials, more and more people are seeking solutions for the stressful, time-urgent, over-stimulated lives we lead. Because the Internet can't provide satisfying answers to all of life's questions, people are turning in increasing numbers to time-honored practices like meditation for proven remedies to life's inevitable ills.

Indeed, according to a recent government survey, more than 10 percent of adults in the United States meditate regularly. That's tens of millions of people! Why do they bother? Because it works. Whether you're seeking greater focus to get your job done more efficiently, less stress and more peace of mind, or a deeper appreciation of the beauty and richness of life, the simple practice of sitting down and turning your attention inward can do wonders for your body and your mind.

The truth is, you can learn the basics of meditation in five minutes. Just sit in a comfortable position, straighten your back, breathe deeply, and rest your attention on the coming and going of your breath. It's as simple as that! If you do it regularly, you'll find that it won't be long before you're feeling more relaxed and enjoying life more. I speak from personal experience: I've been practicing meditation and teaching it to others for more than 40 years.

Simple though it may be, meditation also has tremendous subtlety and depth, if you're interested in pursuing it further. It's a lot like painting: You can buy your materials, take a few lessons, and have fun applying paint to paper. Or you can attend classes at your local education center or community college, specialize in a particular medium in art school, and make painting a central part of your life. In meditation, as in art, you can keep it simple — just get up every day and sit quietly for five or ten minutes — or explore the subtleties to your heart's content. It all depends on your needs, your intentions, and your level of interest and passion.

## About This Book

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When I began teaching meditation, I was always hard-pressed to come up with a single book that taught the basics, provided a comprehensive overview of techniques and practices, and offered guidance in going deeper. Global surveys

generally ignore the nuts and bolts — what to focus on, how to sit, what to do about your crazy mind, and so on. Books that teach you how to meditate tend to offer just a few techniques. And those that show you how to explore the rich inner world of meditation often have a sectarian spiritual perspective that limits the breadth of their presentation. (In other words, you may have to be a Buddhist or a yogi or a Sufi to know what they're talking about.)

Unlike those other books on meditation, *Meditation For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, covers all the bases. If you're looking for simple, easy-to-follow meditation instructions, you can find state-of-the-art guidance here that's filled with helpful tips from seasoned meditators as well as time-honored wisdom from the great teachers of old. If you want to get an overview of the meditation field before you zero in on a particular method or teaching, you can catch a glimpse of the primary approaches that are readily available these days. If you've been meditating in a particular way and want to expand your horizons to include other techniques, you'll be pleased to discover that this book features dozens of different meditations for a variety of purposes. They're drawn from a range of sources and traditions. And if you just want to understand why other people meditate — for instance, your partner, your friends, the guy in the office next to yours — and why you may want to join them, jump on board! You can read through whole chapters on how meditation makes you happier (and healthier), what science has learned about the physical and psychological benefits of meditation, and how you can get the most from meditation.

As a special bonus, this book includes instructional tracks, which are available online at [www.dummies.com/go/meditation](http://www.dummies.com/go/meditation). With these tracks, I guide you step by step through a dozen of the most powerful and effective meditations described in the book. When you've had your fill of reading and want something more experiential, you can sit down in a comfortable position, pop in the disc, and let my voice lead you effortlessly through the complete meditation process, from start to finish. What could be more accessible and user-friendly than that?

This book is many things at once: an instructional manual, a survey course, and a guidebook for deeper exploration. Feel free to read it from cover to cover if you want, or just browse until you find the chapters that appeal to you. Throughout the book, you find meditations and exercises you can experiment with and enjoy. Some of them are also offered at [www.dummies.com/go/meditation](http://www.dummies.com/go/meditation), so you can discover how to practice them directly without referring to the text.

The best thing about this book, in my humble estimation, is that it's fun to read. Meditation doesn't have to be a dull or somber affair. Quite the contrary: The whole point of meditating in the first place is to lighten up and experience more peace and joy in your life. So forget those stereotypes of the enigmatic Zen monk or the reclusive navel-gazer! You can find out everything you ever wanted to know about meditation and enjoy yourself in the process.



Feel free to skip the sidebars that appear throughout the book; these shaded gray boxes contain interesting info that isn't essential to your understanding of meditation.

Within this book, you may note that some web addresses break across two lines of text. If you're reading this book in print and want to visit one of these web pages, simply key in the web address exactly as it's noted in the text, pretending as though the line break doesn't exist. If you're reading this as an e-book, you've got it easy — just click the web address to be taken directly to the web page.

## Foolish Assumptions

When I wrote this book, I made a few assumptions about you, dear reader, that I thought I should share with you before we begin:

- » You're intrigued enough by the topic of meditation to pick up this book, but you haven't yet discovered how to meditate. Or if you have, you still feel the need for more guidance.
- » You want less stress and more happiness and peace of mind, and you're willing to devote a little of your precious time to achieve it.
- » Because you can't afford to spend long hours meditating in a monastery or ashram, you want instruction that you can put to use right now at home or at work.
- » You don't live on a desert island or in some isolated part of the globe; instead, you inhabit the ordinary world and confront the usual stresses, pressures, and responsibilities that most people face.

If these assumptions apply to you, you're definitely in the right place!

## Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, I use icons in the margins to draw your attention to particular kinds of information. Here's a key to what those icons mean:



PLAY THIS

For direct personal guidance in practicing the meditations marked by this icon, just put down your book, cue up the audio track, and follow my lead.



REMEMBER

If I haven't said it before, I should have — it's important information that bears repeating.



TIP

If you want your meditations to be easier and more effective, follow these tidbits of insider advice.

## Beyond the Book

In addition to the material in the print or e-book you're reading right now, this product comes with some access-anywhere goodies on the web. Check out the free Cheat Sheet for tips on how to prepare for meditation, how to get the most from your meditation, how to make sure you're meditating correctly, and more. To get this Cheat Sheet, simply go to [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com) and type **Meditation For Dummies Cheat Sheet** in the Search box.

## Where to Go from Here

After you know the lay of the land, your next step is to decide where to go. Remember that you don't have to read the book sequentially, from cover to cover — you can pick it up anywhere your interests lead you. I've written it intentionally with just such an approach in mind.

If you're drawn to a more theoretical discussion of the philosophical, historical, and scientific background of meditation, by all means start with Part 1, in which I discuss meditation's history, its health benefits, and its positive effects on the body and brain. But if you're eager to get to the nitty-gritty and can't wait to sit down and start practicing, you may want to head directly for Part 2, which provides everything you need to know to meditate effectively.

After you've been practicing for a few weeks or months, you can return for a refresher course and fine-tune your meditation by reading in Part 3 about the various difficulties and obstacles that may arise as well as about strategies for developing and expanding your practice. And if you have particular areas of interest, such as spirituality, healing, or performance enhancement, you can find what you're looking for in Part 4. Feel free to browse, meander, and read whatever strikes your fancy!

Finally, I would love to hear from you. To get in touch with me, check out my website at [www.stephanbodian.org](http://www.stephanbodian.org) or email me at [info@stephanbodian.org](mailto:info@stephanbodian.org).

# 1

## **Getting Started with Meditation**

## **IN THIS PART . . .**

Get an overview of the meditation journey to help guide you in your practice.

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Motivate yourself by realizing the many great reasons to meditate.

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Explore the multicultural history of meditation to understand how it evolved.

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Discover how meditation has entered the mainstream in education, business, and healthcare.

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Delve into the research into meditation's effectiveness in order to appreciate its many benefits.

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Trace the many ways meditation actually changes the brain for the better.

## IN THIS CHAPTER

Climbing the mountain of meditation

Finding picnic spots and lesser peaks along the way

Checking out the major meditation techniques

Knowing what you'll see when you get to the top

Developing concentration, receptive awareness, contemplation, and cultivation

Access the audio tracks at  
[www.dummies.com/go/meditation](http://www.dummies.com/go/meditation)

## Chapter 1

# Embarking on Your Meditation Journey

**T**he great thing about meditation is that it's actually quite simple. Just sit down, be quiet, turn your attention inward, and focus your awareness. That's all there is to it, really (see the sidebar "Meditation: It's easier than you think"). Then why, you may be wondering, do people write so many books and articles about meditation — including detailed books like this one? Why not just offer a few brief instructions and forget about all the verbiage?

Say, for example, that you're planning to take a long trip by car to some picturesque location. You can just jot down the directions and follow them one by one. After a few days, you'll get to where you want to go. But you'll enjoy the trip more if you have a travel guide to point out the sights along the way. And you may feel more secure if you carry a troubleshooting manual to tell you what to do when you have problems with your car. Perhaps you'd like to take some side trips to scenic spots or even change your itinerary entirely and get there by a different route or a different vehicle!



PLAY THIS

## MEDITATION: IT'S EASIER THAN YOU THINK

Meditation is simply the practice of focusing your attention on a particular object — generally something simple, like a word or phrase, a candle flame or geometrical figure, or the coming and going of your breath. In everyday life, your mind is constantly processing a barrage of sensations, visual impressions, emotions, and thoughts. In general, when you meditate, you narrow your focus, limit the stimuli bombarding your nervous system — and calm your mind in the process.

For a quick taste of meditation, follow these instructions. (For detailed audio instructions, listen to Track 2. Or, for more complete meditation instructions, see Chapter 7.)

**1. Find a quiet place and sit comfortably with your back relatively straight.**

If you tend to disappear into your favorite chair, find something a bit more supportive.

**2. Take a few deep breaths, close your eyes, and relax your body as much as you can.**

If you don't know how to relax, you may want to check out Chapter 7.

**3. Choose a word or phrase that has special personal or spiritual meaning for you.**

Here are some examples: "There's only love," "Don't worry, be happy," "Trust in God."

**4. Begin to breathe through your nose, and as you breathe, repeat the word or phrase quietly to yourself.**

You can whisper the word or phrase, *subvocalize* it (that is, move your tongue as though you're saying it, but don't say it aloud), or just repeat it in your mind. If you get distracted, come back to the repetition of the word or phrase. (If you have difficulty breathing through your nose, by all means breathe through your mouth instead.)

As an alternative, you can rest your attention on your breath as it comes and goes through your nostrils, returning to your breathing when you get distracted.

**5. Keep the meditation going for five minutes or more and then slowly get up and go about your day.**

How did you feel during meditation? Did it seem weird to say the same thing or follow your breath over and over? Did you find it difficult to stay focused? Did you keep changing the phrase? If so, don't worry. With regular practice and the guidance of this book, you'll gradually get the knack.

Of course, you could easily spend many fruitful and enjoyable years mastering the subtleties and complexities of meditation. But the good news is, the basic practice is actually quite simple, and you don't have to be an expert to do it or to enjoy its extraordinary benefits.