

POSTURE for MEDITATION

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Is there an ideal body position for meditation?

Most people think you can only be meditating if you're sitting cross-legged (probably in full lotus) with eyes closed, incense burning & maybe some music or chanting going on. Not so. You can meditate in 4 positions – sitting, standing, walking, lying down – basically all the positions our body is in during the course of our life. (And if you spend a good deal of time upside down, you can meditate there as well. I do know many yoga practitioners who apply meditation skills in all sorts of positions.)

So, while you can basically meditate in any position, and ultimately you'll be able to implement these techniques & strategies as you go about your daily life, we're going to start with the sitting position, which is the most commonly employed position for formal practice as it is especially conducive to the development of concentration. It possesses two qualities: alertness & repose. You are alert because you are upright, as when you stand or walk – but without having to focus on moving the body safely. Plus, you are settled as when lying down & and thus you can relax deeply into it. We will also address the lying down position but first let's go over *sitting equipment*.

SITTING EQUIPMENT:

- a) Zafu. A Zafu¹ is the round cushion that is used for sitting in meditation. They are usually made of kapok (a kind of cotton) or buckwheat filling – depending on individual preference. (The kapok is firmer while the buckwheat has more 'give'.) A zafu raises the hips, making the entire range of cross-legged sitting positions more stable for the meditator.
- b) Zabuton. A Zabuton² is a rectangular or square padded mat or cushion that is often used under the zafu or bench to provide comfort & support. It cushions the knees & ankles (which is especially preferable when sitting for longer periods.)
- c) Seiza Bench. A seiza bench is a small bench made for the purpose of meditation. One sits on it with the legs underneath.
- d) Extra cushions. In any position, it is common to have extra small cushions to wedge beneath knees, behind back, or upon sitting apparatus. Often recommended if the body is having difficulty maintaining a lengthened spine with relative comfort in any position.



Zafu (Buckwheat)



Zafu (Kapok)



Zafu on Zabuton



Seiza Bench on Zabuton

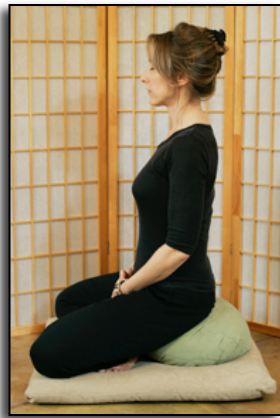
Okay, now let's examine the different options of physical positions with meditation:

MEDITATION POSITIONS (SITTING & LYING DOWN)

- a) Quarter Lotus
- b) Half Lotus
- c) Full Lotus
- d) Burmese Position
- e) Seiza (bench or zafu)
- f) Chair (regular or ergonomic)
- g) Lying down



Quarter-Lotus



side view



Half-Lotus



Full-Lotus

A cross-legged seated position is commonly called a 'lotus' position.

1. QUARTER LOTUS (Legs crossed with both feet below the opposite thigh or knee. This is commonly called "Indian Style.")
2. HALF LOTUS (Legs crossed with one foot resting on the opposite thigh and the other foot underneath.)
3. FULL LOTUS (Legs crossed with both feet resting on opposite thighs.)

For any lotus position, usually the zafu is placed towards the back of the zabuton with the bottom of the torso placed on the front part of the zafu, so that the knees are on the zabuton and a base triangle of support is created with the legs & torso to foster physical stability.

4. BURMESE POSITION (OR BURMESE LOTUS) (Both feet laying flat on the floor without crossing the legs. For many this is an easier alternative than sitting cross-legged.)

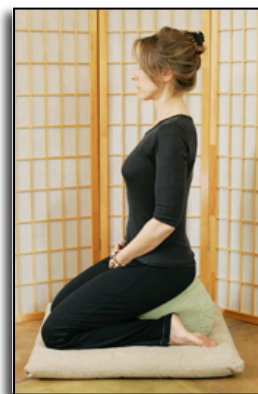


5. SEIZA with a BENCH or ZAFU

(Legs are under the body, with knees forward and top of foot against the floor, heels up. The zafu is usually placed on its side for this position. A (firmer) kapok zafu will usually create a higher lift - bringing more ease to the knees, while a buckwheat zafu will have more 'give' and possibly be more comfortable in the seat. Experiment for your own comfort.)



Seiza w/bench



Seiza w/zafu

6. CHAIR (regular or 'ergonomic') (Body may be placed on front edge of chair seat, or with pelvis against back of chair, and spine lengthened away from the chair. Extra pillows may be helpful to support the posture for longer periods. It will be helpful to have your feet flat on the floor, and aligned with the hips & knees (and if you're shorter, you may want a pillow under your feet to keep them flat.) You may also want a pillow *underneath* you to elevate your hips so that they are higher than your knees (which promotes a lengthened spine.) (See "Important Physical Considerations" on page 5.)



Chair (edge)



Chair (w/padding)



Ergonomic Chair

7. LYING DOWN If you have chronic or acute pain that makes sitting upright not practical for longer periods of time, lying down is a viable option. The tendency to go to sleep, needless to say, is much more of an issue, but there are ways of encouraging alertness when lying down.

STAYING ALERT when lying down! If you can put FEET ON THE FLOOR with KNEES UP – that can be helpful for maintaining alertness as the effort to maintain the upright position of the knees will help keep you alert – as well as the fact that the knees will probably begin to fall when you begin to dose off and that falling movement will be a gentle reminder to wake up. This is also a very nice position for the lower back. I recommend this (if possible) over putting a cushion under the knees - as resting on a cushion can be more conducive to sleeping.

Also, quite effective is holding the hands in a MUDRA (see page 10) with the THUMBS TOUCHING each other. Shinzen Young, my meditation teacher, often demonstrates how this can work as a feedback device – i.e. when you are beginning to lose consciousness and drift off, the thumbs will pull apart and that will wake you up to bring you back to your meditation.



Lying down (side view)



Lying down (from above)

While the photos show me lying on two zabutons (which is how I usually set people up in my studio), some people like lying on a HARDER SURFACE, like a yoga mat, to help stay more alert – with some kind of cushion or LUMBAR SUPPORT UNDER THE HEAD. You find what works for you.

Here is another (much more obscure) technique for maintaining alertness when meditating lying down. [No photo of this option, sorry.] It's not for everybody but it may work for you.

(I have a friend who swears by it.) **BALANCE ONE FOREARM VERTICALLY ON ITS ELBOW**, hand relaxed. When you get the forearm completely vertical and balanced – it takes almost no effort to keep it there. The idea is that when/if you begin to slip into sleep, the arm will start to fall. It's a gentle sensation at first but gets stronger as the arm falls further – basically the same strategy as my “knees up” approach but for some it's much more effective. Again, try it and see if it works for you.

SO WHICH POSITION DO YOU USE?

You may have to experiment with different positions until you find the one that suits you. You may also alternate between positions for different length sits. For example, I tend to prefer the seiza on a zafu, but sometimes like to switch to half lotus when teaching or for shorter sits. My leg falls asleep from the hip down quite easily in a lotus, so I tend not to opt for it for longer sits (unless I'm interested in exploring my relationship to pain). Some people like to alternative between a cushion (zafu) & a chair – especially when on retreat where they may be sitting for many hours each day – just to give a break to the knees and legs which are not used to prolonged periods in the same position.

My motto is to “Be Kind” to your body. There are naturally going to be some aches & pains when you begin a sitting practice as you start holding the body in positions it's not used to, but there is no need to cause objective damage or have excessive pain. If you can create ease & less discomfort – while maintaining a posture that helps keep you alert – you're doing good.

IMPORTANT PHYSICAL CONSIDERATIONS WITH ANY SITTING POSITION:

1. SPINE LENGTHENED & BALANCED
 - i. Potential Pitfalls (*Arching, Slouching, Efforting Head*)
2. Hips Higher Than the Knees
3. Let the whole body RELAX INTO THE POSTURE

LENGTHENED Spine. The main point to emphasize about posture is that the SPINE³ should be lengthened. You want the body to be BALANCED with the weight evenly distributed on the pelvic bones, shoulders balanced over hips, elbows under shoulders, head resting over torso & pelvis. If your elbows are out a bit, that will better allow room for the breath than if they are tight against your body. Notice if there is tension in the shoulders and see if you can deliberately let the shoulders relax back & down. We're going for support & relaxation at the same time – i.e. *less tension & more ease*.

You also want a lengthened spine for very *practical* reasons. In meditation, we want the body to be relaxed and the mind to be alert. We start off with our eyes closed (to minimize distractions until we've developed that stellar concentration.)

Okay. So, there we are. Eyes closed & body relaxed. Hmmmm. Well, what do you think tends to happen? Yep, you guessed right. It's quite probable that you're going to start to nod off and go to sleep. (Shinzen calls it the "Zen Lurch" and he imitates someone beginning to nod off and then jerking themselves back into sitting posture as the falling forward wakes them up. We all laugh in recognition when he does this.)

Given our sleep-deprived, stressed lives, when we do finally give ourselves an opportunity to stop, relax & close our eyes, the body's need for rest kicks in – along with the body's Pavlovian/Skinnerian conditioning that says, "Eyes closed, body tired, THAT's OUR CUE TO GO TO *SLEEP!*"

So, while you may get that nap you needed, you're not developing any muscles of concentration, mindfulness or equanimity. The temporary benefit is addressed, but the long-term ones are not.

THUS, we LENGTHEN OUR SPINE! When the spine is lengthened it activates the reticular activating system⁴ in the brain – causing more alertness. The mind literally wakes up. (A handy bit of information, isn't it?)

So, a LENGTHENED SPINE HELPS THE BODY BE MORE ALERT.

Hips Higher than the Knees. If you look at the posture photos included, you'll notice that the hips are always higher than the knees. This puts the PELVIS in a position to *naturally* support a lengthened, balanced spine. (And I suggest, when sitting in a chair, to actually put a cushion underneath you if they aren't.) When we do the *reverse* – i.e. knees higher than hips (like if we sat on the floor without a cushion⁵, or in a chair that sinks back) – the pelvis tilts back and it's very difficult to maintain that lovely lengthened spine that will help us stay alert.

Thus, hips higher than the knees makes having that lengthened spine much EASIER to achieve. In fact, if you're having difficulty sitting up erect, raise the hips even HIGHER. Don't worry about the hips being too high. You could be practically standing. Look at the photo of the ergonomic chair posture. It is designed to be the optimal position for the pelvis & legs to *naturally* create a balanced spinal column. Hips higher than knees. It may feel unusual, but just try it and you'll discover much more ease in your body – especially for longer sits.

Relax the Jaw. Letting the jaw relax will have a 'trickle down' effect on the rest of the body. The jaw often/usually gets engaged when we are trying to 'control' and letting the JAW DROP (even just a ¼ or ½ inch) will help promote release in other parts of the body. This is something you can do repeatedly or at any point during your meditation and you'll probably discover that yes, the jaw did tighten a bit and here's another opportunity to release it.

Your teeth ideally should be slightly apart, like when you make an "N". Lifting of the back of the head and tilting the chin down slightly should create a more supported head and thus help the jaw relax & the head rest comfortably on top of the spine.

Breathe. Breathing is good and highly recommended. Okay, all joking aside, don't get all cramped up over trying to get the perfect posture. The purpose of posture is to PHYSICALLY SUPPORT your practice. You want a solid base, and ease. If you are noticing tension or tightness, see if you can find a way to sit more comfortably while allowing the spine to be lengthened. And the dropping of the jaw will help allow the lower belly to soften, so that the air can flow freely and contribute to the relaxation of the body.

Many forms of meditation and yoga encourage breathing in certain ways. In traditional Vipassana practice, we just let the breathing happen naturally – let it assume the course it wants. To deepen your sense of relaxing into the posture, you can tune into the intrinsic relaxation that accompanies each out-breath. (My favorite source of relaxation.)

POTENTIAL PITFALLS.

- a) ARCHING
- b) SLOUCHING
- c) EFFORTING HEAD
- d) LEGS FALLING ASLEEP/DISCOMFORT FROM POSTURE
- e) SLEEPINESS

Okay, here's some pitfalls you may land in. We may say 'lengthened spine' but that means different things to different people – especially if you've never had someone physically work with you on your posture for any reason.

A) ARCHING

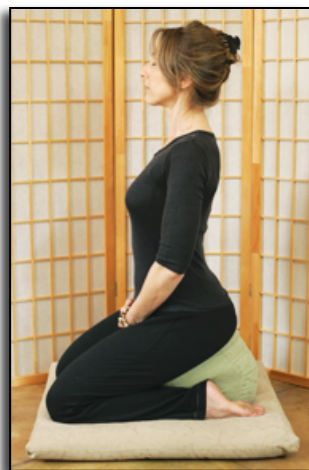
Some people end up actually ARCHING their back by pushing the chest out. (See photo below.) Usually, these people are applying a lot of tension in the shoulder blades to “hold” this position. Often within 10 minutes, they will start to feel discomfort on one or both sides of the spine in the lower/mid back. Depending on the amount of tension in the shoulders, they may get sore in the upper back as well.

We cannot, in this book, adjust your posture for you. That’s something best done in person by a qualified professional (maybe a yoga teacher, Alexander Technique instructor or other trained body worker.) But we can alert you to potential problems. (And if you feel significant pain or discomfort that you don’t normally feel, in the areas just mentioned, you may want to refer to the diagrams included in this book and/or consult a trained professional.)

But please be prepared for a *minimum* degree of discomfort that would happen naturally whenever trying any physical position or activity that your body is not used to doing. You’ll know you need to adjust the posture when it becomes painful during the sit and/or there is soreness for an extended time afterwards.

B) SLOUCHING

The other most common unhelpful posture is the SLOUCH – where the pelvis tips back, the back rounds, the shoulders & head slump forward. (See photo.) This usually leads to unconsciousness (especially if you’re tired), and the back of your neck & top of your back will take the brunt of the stress.



Arched Back



Slouch (a)



Slouch (b)



Efforting Head

The human head weighs between 10-20 pounds. That’s about the size & weight of a bowling ball. Now if you took a bowling ball and held it out at arm’s length, it wouldn’t take long for your arm to get tired, cramped, and pretty unhappy. Well, if the bowling ball represents your head, then your arm represents your neck (which explains a lot of the neck pain going around.) Most of us spend a good deal of our lives, whether at the computer or driving or watching TV, slumped with the head forward & not balanced on top of the spine. (No wonder our necks are usually tight & achy.)

When you combine this physical habit with long periods (or frequent shorter periods) of meditation, the back of the neck, top of the back & jaw develop extra tensions to cope. Sitting in a chair can be especially conducive to slouching. The most helpful way to sit in a chair is with the feet on the floor and either sitting on the front edge of the chair - or padding the space between your back and the back of the chair to create the lengthened spine. (See photo on page 3.) This is often the most preferable option for older people. (And don't forget about padding that seat, if need be, to help the hips be higher than the knees. A lengthened spine = a cured slouch.)

C) 'EFFORTING HEAD'

Another more subtle problem is what I call the "efforting head" - i.e. we have some idea that we want to connect to something 'higher' and/or we're 'trying' to be the good meditation student, and the head reaches up and forward with an elevated chin. (See photo on previous page.) Just learning to focus your mind can be a kind of effort you're not used to and that can manifest physically in the head pushing forward or up as you're trying to keep your awareness on the object of meditation.

Like the slouch, this places the head slightly forward and encourages a crunching up at the back of the neck, which will lead to the same neck tension as our bowling ball example above. This tendency is often accompanied by tightness in the chest and jaw (as the body is in 'effort' or 'control' mode). I highly encourage relaxation, especially on the out-breath, letting the jaw drop down towards gravity as the head lifts up and lengthens the spine.

Shinzen used to say, "Create a central column – and let everything hang from that." I like that. You can visualize each vertebra stacked and balanced upon the one beneath it, creating a column (the spinal column!). Letting the body HANG from that is a nice way to get the support and relaxation that is preferable for sitting practice.

And, again, you may also allow the HEAD to LIFT LIGHTLY UPWARDS (as if it's a helium balloon or a string is attached to the top – especially allowing the BACK OF THE HEAD to lift more) with the BODY & JAW HANGING down from it. The more you practice this, the more it will become a natural 'habit' that will take place without your attention (while you're attending to your meditation.)

Shinzen now says "Stretch up and settle in" – which is also quite nice. There are many helpful verbs for what we want the spine to do – stretch up, lengthen, balance, hang from a lifting head – find the verb that feels good for you, that helps you take advantage of the alertness a lengthened spine can bring to your meditation – as well as the ease that being balanced can bring.

Don't underestimate the POWER of the POSTURE itself AS A MEDITATION PRACTICE. There are meditation practices that do nothing but focus on the physical experience of sitting – one of which is aptly called "Just Sitting."

D) LEGS FALLING ASLEEP? DISCOMFORT FROM THE POSTURE?

I don't know anyone who hasn't dealt with this, and I've already mentioned that any kind of lotus will knock out all sensation for me from the hip down (usually within 20 minutes.) So, what does one do about that? Well, unless you're at a very strict Zen sesshin or deliberately practicing "strong determination" sitting (where you do not move a muscle for long sitting periods), it's usually fine to make some minor adjustment to make your body more comfortable should pains arise (as long as you can do so without disturbing others meditating near you), *HOWEVER*, I would suggest NOT giving in to every urge or impulse to move.

A large part of the benefit of meditation comes from the STILLNESS OF THE BODY. Even if you are not implementing any particular meditation technique, by just stilling the body, you are allowing the deeper mind to process & sort in a way that it can't during the constant input of our lives & movement. So my suggestion is to SIT WITH any discomforts or urges to move, at least for a little while (ideally noticing your emotional responses without attachment), BEFORE making adjustments to your sitting posture. And then do so slowly & quietly, keeping mindful of inside & outside.

E) FALLING ASLEEP?

And in the section on LYING DOWN meditation, I came up with specific techniques that are helpful in that position, but what about when SITTING? I've already explained in detail how a lengthened spine keeps the mind alert. So, the first thing you should do, if you find yourself nodding off or your awareness sinking into pre-dream-land, is to LENGTHEN the SPINE.

The second thing you might try (and this will depend on what meditation technique you're using) would be to OPEN YOUR EYES. Some meditation practices always have the eyes open. Most practice, especially for newer meditators in the mindfulness tradition, is eyes-closed. (This is mostly because external vision can be distracting while we are still developing those lovely concentration muscles. That's the reason we don't have televisions, newspapers, telephones or conversation at retreats - to keep distractions to a minimum in order to promote the concentration and examination of our subjective experience.) But it's better to be AWAKE and distracted than *asleep* (at least in terms of developing concentration & meditation techniques that foster insight, purification, ease & well-being.) When meditating with eyes open, you are not going to want to be looking around the room (which would be distracting.) It's helpful to keep the gaze forward.

If you're *still* falling asleep even though you are doing your best to maintain a lengthened spine with eyes open – STAND UP. Yes, that's right, just stand in place. At first you might feel self-conscious (which right there will wake you up), but very few people fall asleep while standing and it will help bring energy & alertness to your body & mind. You might stand for a few minutes or the remainder of the meditation. Whatever works for you. Just know that standing is an *absolutely legitimate* posture for meditation. Relax into the standing posture as you would into the sitting posture. You are also encouraged to stand to relieve possible physical

discomfort caused by longer sitting. (Just be sure when moving between standing & sitting, as with movement to adjust posture, that you move slowly and are mindful of those around you as you get up & sit down.)

And last but not least, if you're just so sleep-deprived that you can't sit up and you're doing the "Zen Lurch" (see p.5) – leave the zendo and TAKE A NAP. Maybe your body just needs a bit of rest. Longer naps will tend to make you groggy, but a short nap can be rejuvenating.

More experienced meditators know that you can eventually RE-ENGINEER SLEEPINESS into ENERGY. You may have to log in a lot of hours of meditation before you experience that, but maybe not. (One way to begin is to notice the sensations of sleepiness in the body and become fascinated with them – i.e. the pull behind the eyes, the heaviness, etc.) If you're on retreat, you might want to explore this by doing a YAZA, or all-night sit – a great opportunity to jump start that re-engineering.

MUDRA. Okay, I've mentioned it so let me quickly and briefly describe what a mudra is. In Hinduism & Buddhism, there are various gestures made with the hands & fingers that are called 'mudras.' Different traditions emphasize use of different mudras for different purposes – but you can meditate just fine without any mudra. For our purposes, we're not going to delve into different mudras and their meanings, but simply acknowledge a few positions of the hands that are helpful and commonly used.

The most common one is a 'circle' (or 'Dyhana') mudra, which represents contemplation and is said to symbolize the Buddha in a state of meditation. Both hands are placed on the lap (or held over the belly.)

The first 2 photos below demonstrate the "dharma-dhatu-samadhi mudra. "Dharma dhatu" means "the cosmos" – i.e. the *realm* of dharma. And 'samadhi' would be depth of experience (a simplified definition), so altogether it means "the mudra of Cosmic Samadhi." It can be done with the left or right hand on the bottom, and is typically used in Japanese Soto Zen. The one hand rests on top of the other, with both palms facing upward and thumbs just lightly touching to form a circle. (See photos below.)

The 3rd photo is 'Taiji' or Yin/Yang Mudra, traditionally used in Japanese Rinzai Zen. Hands are held loosely together with one thumb inside the other palm and with the rest of the fingers wrapping around the other hand. (See 3rd photo.)

These are what you'll tend to see, in terms of mudras, if any, at a Vipassana retreat.



Cosmic Samadhi mudra
Left hand on bottom



Cosmic Samadhi mudra
Right hand on bottom



Yin Yang mudra

There are many other mudras that have specific symbolic meanings and/or are meant to evoke certain qualities or aspects of experience, and if you are interested in exploring them, Google away. The mudras described above are demonstrated in the photos.

However, as I said, a mudra is definitely not integral to your sitting posture so do what works for you. Your hands can simply rest on your lap. Period.

The most helpful point I can make here, is to suggest that *whatever* hand position you use, that it be comfortable and not pull your elbows too far away from the side of your body. When the elbows are beside your body (with a bit of space between them and the body), it is much easier to sit up lengthened, but when the elbows are pulled forward of the body – they will tend to pull the shoulders forward and encourage the ‘Slouch.’

If you can find a way to meditate with each hand on a knee, for example, and palms up (as is the practice in other traditions – especially yoga) without pulling the shoulders forward, go for it. (This is much easier if you have longer arms.) Otherwise, I’d recommend finding a position of the hands closer to the torso to create a more relaxed experience of the lengthened spine – with or without a mudra.

LAST NOTE

I already mentioned that the posture can be a practice in and of itself, but also don’t underestimate the power of the kinesthetic memory of the body. Just as familiar music can re-evoked an emotion you had when you first heard it, just by returning the body to this posture/position, that is used primarily for meditation, can help the mind settle and the ‘molecules re-align’ (not a technical term) to a depth of focus, relaxation & peace associated with former sits. For some people, myself included, just hearing the meditation bell can do that - and just dropping into my posture can bring to mind techniques & clarity that I didn’t have a moment before. So, cultivating good meditation posture can be a clever strategy on lots of levels.

QUESTIONS?

I hope these pages have helped illuminate the issue of how the body participates and supports the meditative process. If you still have questions about Posture, Positions, Pitfalls or the Practice – please consult a facilitator or teacher to address them in person.

On the last page, I’ve created a ‘cheat sheet’, of sorts, called “Posture-at-a-Glance.” It is basically an outline summary of the major points presented in this article, and should work as a quick reminder.

And here is where I congratulate you (and thank you) for doing this practice – *at all*. As Shinzen says, “A good meditation is one you did.”

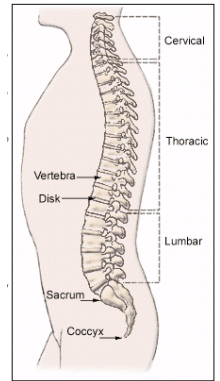
AND SOME FOOTNOTES TO ENTERTAIN YOU

¹ **"Zafu"** is often translated from Japanese to mean "sewn seat", but actually "Za" (座) means "seat", and "fu" (蒲) means cattail. As a word, "zafu" means a seat made out of cattails. The origins of the Japanese zafu (座蒲) came from China where these meditation seats were originally made out of cattail – which is no longer the case.

² A **zabuton** (座布団) is a Japanese cushion for sitting. The kanji characters 座布団 literally translated are "seat-cloth-sphere". In meditation, practitioners sit on zafu which is typically placed on top of a zabuton. The zabuton cushions the knees and ankle.

³ **Lengthened Spine.** The spine has a natural & flexible curve in the lower back & behind the neck. When we say "lengthened spine" we mean in alignment & balanced (i.e. one vertebra balance on top of the one below) without any extra unhelpful distortions, pressures or tensions. [Note illustration of spine.]

⁴ The **reticular activating system** is the name given to part of the brain (the reticular formation and its connections) believed to be the center of arousal and motivation in animals (including humans.) The activity of this system is crucial for maintaining the state of consciousness. It is situated at the core of the brain stem between the myelencephalon (medulla oblongata) and mesencephalon (midbrain.)



⁵ **Sitting with no Cushion.** I only addressed this possibility in passing because it is uncomfortable for most people and almost always leads to a rounded spine (see "slouch" on p.6) But a friend who recently returned from India noted that "...in the Hindu practice, sitting on the floor is considered "normal" and the way we are first taught. Cushions are not discouraged or anything, but neither are they seen as the "normal" way to meditate."

He continued, "Fascinating cultural note: In India people sit on the ground constantly -- whether meditating or doing almost anything else -- and actually grow a thick little pad on the side of their ankle bone, like the kind you would normally get on the sole of the foot if you walked barefoot all the time. After living there for six months and sitting like that all the time, my ankles started getting them too. So if you sit on the ground long enough, you actually grow your own natural meditation cushions!"

We are, however, going for the most *comfort* we can with a lengthened spine and thus, unless you're really interested in padded ankles, you might want to rest on a cushion, bench or chair (with that lovely lengthened spine.)

Posture (at-a-glance)

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1. FIND MOST COMFORTABLE POSITION
 - a. Lotus (full, half, quarter, Burmese)
 - b. Seiza (zafu, bench)
 - c. Chair (edge, padded, ergonomic)
 - d. Other options: Standing, Lying down, Walking
2. HIPS HIGHER THAN KNEES
3. LENGTHEN SPINE
(allow head to be balanced on top of spine, gently lifting upwards)
4. ALLOW BODY TO HANG *(from upward lifting head)*
5. LET JAW DROP
6. PITFALLS
 - a. Arching
 - b. Slouching
 - c. Reaching head/elevated chin
 - d. Legs Fall Asleep/Discomfort *(ok to adjust and/or work with reaction)*
 - e. Sleepiness *(lengthen spine, eyes open, stand-up, take a nap, do a yaza)*

You want the body to be COMFORTABLE & the mind ALERT.

Find a sitting posture that allows you to feel stable and not strained.
The lengthened spine will contribute to alertness.

Allowing the body & jaw to hang from the central column of the spine, with the shoulders relaxed back & down. Let the breath do what it wants – and the body be reposed.

Being alert leads to insight. Insight enlightens consciousness.
Repose leads to equanimity. Equanimity purifies consciousness.

7. CONGRATULATE YOURSELF!

“A good meditation is one you did.”



STEPHANIE NASH is a Mindfulness Coach, Integrative Counselor & Speaker who is an expert teacher in the Unified Mindfulness system (developed by Shinzen Young) which has been researched by Harvard University Medical School with breakthrough results. It has been proven to be unique in its effectiveness and adaptability – making it ideal for strategic applications. In fact, Stephanie designed the mindfulness program for the 2nd part of that Harvard study (while her brain was one of the one's studied in the first part) – and she was “the voice” recording for a Mindfulness Stress-Reduction Study done by Carnegie Mellon which also used the Unified Mindfulness system. Stephanie has worked closely with Shinzen Young since 1998 and currently also trains other mindfulness teachers in his system.

At UCLArts & Healing, Stephanie teaches “How Body Language Can Affect How You Think and Feel” at and her “Posture for Meditation” (or “Posture-pedia”) article is now used by meditation teachers and centers all over the world – even Navy Seals use it!

Stephanie’s online mindfulness courses can be accessed through her site, Strategic Mindfulness, and Stephanie is a popular teacher on the meditation apps: Insight Timer and Brightmind. Stephanie also has developed stress reduction techniques that incorporate laughter, and she was a guest expert teaching laughing meditation on a Deepak Chopra show.

In addition to extensive study in many physical healing modalities (like Body-Mind Centering™, the Alexander Technique, Linklater Voice Technique, Continuum Movement), Stephanie has a degree in psychology from Duke University and a Masters from Yale University (School of Drama.) She has been a professional actress since 1988 - featured on stage - as well as on TV (and more than her share of commercials), and Steph has been teaching & speaking about mindfulness & stress reduction since 1999.

For More Information:

- www.strategic-mindfulness.com
 - (includes meditation programs for individuals & professionals)
- www.mindfulnessarts.org/blog
 - (non-profit site includes meditations, videos, Youtube channels & blog)

To Contact Steph: strategicmindfulness@gmail.com