

# How to Practice Loving Kindness Meditation

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Loving kindness meditation (LKM) is a popular self-care technique that can be used to boost well-being and reduce stress. Those who regularly practice loving kindness meditation are able to increase their capacity for forgiveness, connection to others, self-acceptance, and more.

This technique is not easy as you are asking yourself to send kindness your way or to others. It often takes practice to allow yourself to receive your own love or to send it.

## Benefits of Loving Kindness Meditation

During loving kindness meditation, you focus benevolent and loving energy toward yourself and others. There are many well- documented benefits of traditional meditation, but as with other techniques, this form of meditation takes practice. It can be difficult and sometimes leads to resistance since the average person is not used to this level of giving and receiving love.

For example, a study published in the 2018 July/August issue of the *Harvard Review of Psychology* provided an overview of scientific evidence related to loving-kindness meditation and other compassion-based interventions.

Study authors concluded that LKM may be beneficial in the treatment of chronic pain and borderline personality disorder but further evidence is needed to confirm these promising effects.

Some published studies have noted that this meditation technique may be useful in the management of social anxiety, marital conflict, anger, and coping with the strains of long-term caregiving. And other research has suggested that loving kindness meditation can enhance the activation of brain areas that are involved in emotional processing and empathy to boost a sense of positivity and reduce negativity.

While more research is needed to confirm the full extent of LKM benefits, there are no risks or costs associated with the practice. So if you choose to give this meditative practice a try, you've got nothing to lose except for a few quiet moments in your day.

## How to Practice Loving Kindness Meditation

There are different ways to practice this form of meditation, each based on different Buddhist traditions, but each variation uses the same core psychological operation. During your meditation, you generate kind intentions toward certain targets including yourself and others.

The following is a simple and effective loving kindness meditation technique to try.

1. Carve out some quiet time for yourself (even a few minutes will work) and sit comfortably. Close your eyes, relax your muscles, and take a few deep breaths.
2. Imagine yourself experiencing complete physical and emotional wellness and inner peace. Imagine feeling perfect love for yourself, thanking yourself for all that you are, knowing that you are just right—just as you are. Focus on this feeling of inner peace, and imagine that you are breathing out tension and breathing in feelings of love.
3. Repeat three or four positive, reassuring phrases to yourself. These messages are examples, but you can also create your own:

May I be happy

May I be safe

May I be healthy, peaceful, and strong May I give and receive appreciation today

Next, bask in feelings of warmth and self-compassion for a few moments. If your attention drifts, gently redirect it back to these feelings of loving kindness. Let these feelings envelop you.

You can choose to either stay with this focus for the duration of your meditation or begin to shift your focus to loved ones in your life. Begin with someone who you are very close to, such as a spouse, a child, a parent, or a best friend. Feel your gratitude and love for them. Stay with that feeling. You may want to repeat the reassuring phrases.

Once you've held these feelings toward that person, bring other important people from your life into your awareness, one by one, and envision them with perfect wellness and inner peace. Then branch out to other friends, family members, neighbors, and acquaintances. You may even want to include groups of people around the world.

Extend feelings of loving kindness to people around the globe and focus on a feeling of connection and compassion. You may even want to include those with whom you are in conflict to help reach a place of forgiveness or greater peace.

When you feel that your meditation is complete, open your eyes. Remember that you can revisit the wonderful feelings you generated throughout the day. Internalize how loving kindness meditation feels, and return to those feelings by shifting your focus and taking a few deep breaths.

## Tips for a More Effective LKM Practice

When you first begin your loving kindness practice, use yourself as the sole subject during meditation. As you get more comfortable with the imagery and loving phrases, begin to add the visualization of others into your practice.

Finally, direct loving kindness meditation toward difficult people in your life. This last arm of LKM boosts feelings of forgiveness and helps you to let go of rumination for an increased sense of inner peace. As you develop a regular practice of meditation, you may want to set a timer with a gentle alarm if you're concerned about spending too much time in focus.

Lastly, remember that this meditation can be practiced in many different ways. The method outlined above is a sample of how you might choose to begin. You may come up with your own loving kindness meditation technique that works better for you. As long as you focus your attention in a way that promotes feelings of loving kindness, you can expect to gain benefits from the practice.

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### Additional Reading

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