The goal of meditation is to focus and quiet your mind, eventually reaching a higher level of awareness and calm. Meditation is an ancient practice, but scientists are still discovering all of its benefits. They have found that regular meditation actually changes your brain. It does so in ways that can help you control emotions, improve concentration and decrease stress. With practice, you will be able to achieve a sense of peace no matter what's going on around you.

Preparing To Meditate

**Choose a peaceful environment.** Meditation should be practiced in a peaceful location where you can focus and avoid distractions. Find a place where you will not be interrupted during your meditation – whether it lasts five minutes or half an hour.

**Wear comfortable clothes.** One of the major goals of meditation is to calm the mind and block out distractions. This can be difficult if you feel physically uncomfortable due to tight or restrictive clothing. Try to wear loose clothing during meditation practice and make sure to remove your shoes.
Decide how long you want to meditate. Before you begin, you should decide how long you are going to meditate. While many experienced meditators recommend 20-minute sessions twice a day, beginners can start by doing as little as five minutes once a day.

Sit in a comfortable position. It is very important that you are comfortable while you meditate, so finding the best position for you is the goal.

Traditionally, meditation is practiced by sitting on a cushion on the ground in the lotus position. In this position, your legs are crossed, with each foot resting on the opposite thigh. For beginners, any position that allows you to sit with a balanced, tall and straight posture will do. You can rest your hands in your lap, on your knees or leave them hanging down by your side.

Close your eyes. Meditation can be performed with the eyes open or closed. As a beginner, it is often best to try meditating with closed eyes in order to avoid visual distractions.

Practicing Meditation

Follow your breathing. The most basic of all meditation methods, breathing meditation, is a great place to start your practicing. Pick a spot above your navel and focus on that spot with your mind. Become aware of the rising and falling of your stomach as you breathe in and out. Don’t make an strong effort to change your breathing patterns. Just breathe normally, focusing on your breathing without passing any sort of judgment on it.

Focus on mental images to guide you. Imagine a coin sitting on the spot above your navel and rising and falling with each breath, or picture something bobbing up and down in the ocean as you breathe in and out. Don’t worry if your mind starts to wander. Just make an effort to refocus your mind on your breathing and try to think of nothing else.

Repeat a mantra. Mantra meditation is another common form of meditation that involves repeating a mantra (a sound, word or phrase) over and over until you silence the mind and enter a deep, meditative state. The mantra can be anything you choose so long as it is easy to
remember. Some good mantras to start with include words such as one, peace, calm and silence. Silently repeat the mantra over and over to yourself as you meditate. Don't worry if your mind wanders off. Just refocus your attention on the repetition of the mantra.

**Practice visualization.** Visualization involves creating a peaceful place in your mind and exploring it until you reach a state of complete calm. The place you visualize could be a sandy beach, a quiet forest or a comfortable room with a roaring fire. Take in the sights, sounds and scents of your surroundings, enjoying the space for as long as you wish. When you are ready to leave, take a few deep breaths, then open your eyes.

**Do a body scan.** Doing a body scan involves focusing on each individual body part in turn and consciously relaxing it. It is a simple meditation method that allows you to relax the mind as you relax the body.

Close your eyes and pick a starting point on your body, such as your toes. Concentrate on whatever sensations you can feel in your toes. Then make a conscious effort to relax them. When your toes are fully relaxed, move up to your feet and repeat the relaxation process. Continue along your body, moving up until you reach the top of your head.

Once you have relaxed each body part, focus on your body as a whole. Enjoy the sensation of calmness you have achieved.
Quiz

1. Which sentence from the article would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
   (A) The goal of meditation is to focus and quiet your mind, eventually reaching a higher level of awareness and calm.
   (B) With practice, you will be able to achieve a sense of peace no matter what's going on around you.
   (C) In this position, your legs are crossed, with each foot resting on the opposite thigh.
   (D) Don't make a strong effort to change your breathing patterns.

2. Which statement is a central idea of the article?
   (A) Many people have health problems and should learn how to meditate to get better.
   (B) Meditation has beneficial effects and can be learned by following some helpful steps.
   (C) Ancient practices like meditation are very useful and can teach modern-day scientists a lot.
   (D) Scientists have just begun to understand how meditation is good for the human body and will continue to study it more.

3. Read the article's introduction [paragraph 1].

   The goal of meditation is to focus and quiet your mind, eventually reaching a higher level of awareness and calm. Meditation is an ancient practice, but scientists are still discovering all of its benefits. They have found that regular meditation actually changes your brain. It does so in ways that can help you control emotions, improve concentration and decrease stress. With practice, you will be able to achieve a sense of peace no matter what's going on around you.

   What does this paragraph do to introduce the MAIN idea?
   (A) It explains the origins of meditation and how it is still used today.
   (B) It explains how people prepare for meditation and then practice it.
   (C) It explains what meditation is and how it is good for the body.
   (D) It explains how people feel after meditating and why it's important.

4. Read the last paragraph of the article.

   Once you have relaxed each body part, focus on your body as a whole. Enjoy the sensation of calmness you have achieved.

   Why did the author MOST likely choose to conclude the article with this paragraph?
   (A) to emphasize how meditation is good for your body
   (B) to reiterate how to go about practicing meditation
   (C) to explain why meditation is necessary for people
   (D) to show how people feel after practicing meditation