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Meditation for Police

A BEGINNERS GUIDE

Contents

- 3 The benefits of meditation for police officers
- 4 The magic of mindfulness
- 5 Meditations to try yourself
- 6 How meditation aids sleep, even for shift workers
- 7 Meditate, on the run
- 8 What is Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR)?

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The benefits of meditation for police officers

Meditation: The health benefits for people working in policing

Policing is a highly stressful job. *Fact.* Far beyond the idea of what work looks like for most, being a police officer pushes many boundaries. There's no 9-5 structure. No 'typical' day. And, there are expectations.

Being a police officer takes an iron stomach. You see the best and worst of humanity – sometimes before you've had your morning coffee. The job can get you down, if you allow it to. So, looking after more than just your fitness is extremely important as an officer. Emotional wellbeing is crucial, and one of the most effective ways to do this naturally is with meditation.

Let's go east for a moment, where meditation started. Some of the earliest written records of meditation come from around 1500 BCE. The Vedas discuss the meditative traditions of ancient India. Around the 6th to 5th centuries BCE, other forms of meditation developed in Taoist China and Buddhist India.

More recently, it's been embraced by the western world as a way of combating stress and anxiety, while improving overall health, peacefulness and wellbeing. It's said that the practice of meditation comes from an instinctive and primal need to connect to the universe and to oneself.

The health benefits of meditation are well known – and the great thing is, they'll be different for everyone. While some people might become more self-aware, others will find they're less stressed and anxious. But what's common, across the board, is that those who practice relaxation methods long-term have far more 'disease-fighting genes' – according to [researchers](#) at Harvard Medical School.

They found genes that protect against pain, infertility, high blood pressure and even rheumatoid arthritis were switched on. This 'relaxation effect', researchers believe, may be just as powerful as any medical drug, but without the side effects.

This 'relaxation effect', researchers believe, can be just as powerful as any medical drug, but without the side effects.

More encouraging still, the benefits of the relaxation effect were found to increase with regular practice: the more people practised relaxation methods such as meditation or deep breathing, the greater their chances of remaining free of arthritis and joint pain, along with stronger immunity, healthier hormone levels and lower blood pressure.

This is proof that your state of mind affects the body on physical and genetic levels.

While there are many physical and mental benefits of meditation, here are some good ones;

- A mind free of stress
- Reduces 'appearance' of ageing
- Helps you appreciate life
- Helps you feel connected
- Helps you to be positive/optimistic
- Improves your brain functionality
- Helps you sleep
- Improves your metabolism & aids in weight loss
- Boosts immunity & assists in fighting diseases
- Helps manage chronic pain
- Increases your attention span

As you can see, meditation *can* heal the body and mind.

The magic of mindfulness

Meditation and mindfulness is the quality or ‘state’ of being conscious or aware of something. It involves achieving a mental state by focusing on your awareness of the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting your feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations.

Achieving mindfulness is the act of observing, describing and acting with awareness of the present moment – without judgement or reaction.

Mindfulness is all about feeling. Once you feel it, you can heal it. It's a great tool to help you become aware of thoughts that are stressing you – stresses you might not even be aware of. By practicing mindfulness, you can start to pay attention to what's going on in the present moment, instead of drawing your thoughts back to the past or into the future. You start to live, because life only exists right here and now.

Research shows that mindfulness enhances emotional regulation, empathy, cognitive performance and working memory.

Combined, these are ingredients of a healthy, empathetic and motivated police officer. Resilient police officers have a greater scope for compassion and performance on the job. Mindfulness training is the bridge to nurturing our body, mind and spirit.

You don't need to believe in a higher being. Meditating, in its simplest form, is about making you a better ‘warrior’.

According to [Loren Christensen](#) in his book 'Meditation for Warriors: Practical Meditation for Cops, Soldiers & Martial Artists', you don't need to follow a particular religion, belief or guru. Christensen shows his readers how to meditate whenever and wherever you want – and without anyone knowing.

Guided meditations are a good place to start.

Meditations to try yourself

There are many free tools available for beginners.

Headspace

Headspace is meditation made simple. Learn online, when you want, wherever you are, in just 10 minutes a day. Hailed as a personal trainer for the mind, if you're new to meditation Headspace's free *Take 10* programme is a great place to start. **Visit the website [headspace.com](https://www.headspace.com) or download the app from your app store.**

Calm

Relax with Calm, a simple mindfulness meditation website and app that brings clarity and peace of mind into your life. Choose from a large selection of calming background theme such as mountain lake, fireplace or sunny meadow and get started on your meditation journey with their free *7 Days of Calm* program.

Visit their website [calm.com](https://www.calm.com) or download the app from your app store.

Meditation Oasis

Take a break now and let your stress melt away! Enjoy the deep relaxation, stress relief and benefits of meditation with Meditation Oasis. Listen with or without music or nature sounds. You can also listen to the relaxing music and nature sounds alone. **Access the Meditation Oasis podcasts online for free at [meditationoasis.com](https://www.meditationoasis.com)**

or download their free *Take a break* app from your app store.

**Remember, mindfulness takes practice.
10 minutes a day, every day.**

Try one of these four meditations:

The body scan

Starting with your head and working down to your arms and feet, notice how you feel in your body. Sensing your head and neck, simply notice if you feel tense, relaxed, calm or anxious. See how far you can spread any sensations of softness and relaxation to areas of your body that feel tense. Once you reach your feet, work back up your body.

Focused breathing

Sit comfortably. Tune into your breathing, follow the sensation of inhaling from your nose, into abdomen and out again. Let any tension go with each exhalation. When you notice your mind wandering, return to your breath.

Repeat a mantra

The relaxation response can be evoked by sitting quietly with eyes closed for at least 10 minutes twice a day, and mentally repeating a simple word.

How meditation aids sleep, even for shift workers

Getting a good night's sleep is important for everyone, but especially police officers. Adequate sleep leads to more than just feeling good. It's a major component of a healthy lifestyle.

Warwick Medical School in the UK conducted a study looking into the connection between sleep and disease.

The results indicated that people reporting sleep of six or fewer hours a night were at higher risk of developing coronary heart disease and stroke compared to people sleeping for the recommended seven to eight hours.

Poor work-life balance is an ongoing issue in Australia, and around the world. A major cause is poor sleep. According to the Lifetime Stress Poll, more than two thirds of Australians lost sleep due to stress.

This evidence was backed up in the ABS Census, which showed that nearly 1.7 million Australian workers worked more than 49 hours a week.

More than half were managers and professionals, representing the biggest proportion of people working more than the standard 40-hour week. Compared to other OECD countries, Australians are working longer hours, but devoting less time to eating, sleeping and leisure activities, including socialising with family and friends.

Police work is highly susceptible to sleep problems. The typical 9-5 office work often doesn't apply for officers. Officers work shifts, at all times of the day and night. Sleep can also be difficult after a particularly troubling day on the job. This means sleep patterns can be disrupted and irregular.

Sleep needs to be made a priority for police officers.

When working odd shifts, melatonin production decreases. This causes the risk of cancer to increase, as well as impairing the immune system, potentially leading to issues such as diabetes, heart disease and obesity. The production of cortisol also increases, too.

You only need a couple of bad nights of sleep to start experiencing the side effects. Depression and anxiety may arise, relationships may start to suffer, and we may become less focused, making it hard to think quickly, which is vitally important for police officers. In our line of work, it's easy to put 'others' first. It's our job to keep the public safe, but you can't if you don't look after yourself.

Meditate, on the run

You don't have to sit still to meditate. This is a common misconception. Active meditation is a style that embraces movement, followed by silence. You can incorporate mindfulness meditation into everyday activities like walking, cooking, cleaning, or your daily commute.

This is especially of value for police officers who often feel time-poor. You can do it anywhere, for short or long periods of time. It's just another way of looking at the tasks you do every day. Instead of being a burden, or another thing to check-off, it can be an opportunity to be mindful.

We should all go out for walks or exercise every day, and one of the most effective ways to ground our body (and mind) is through the practice of *walking meditation*.

We use this time to focus and become mindful of our surroundings. Obviously with a walking meditation, you keep your eyes open. This means we're not turning our attention away from the outside world, but rather making a conscious effort to be aware of it – the sun, wind, grass, birds, music, cars, and other people.

The point to active meditation is that *any action can be a mindful exercise*.

You don't have to dedicate 15 minutes every day with your spine straight and legs crossed. It could be something as simple as cooking your dinner. Turn this into your daily meditation.

Keep these five tips in mind:

1 Don't think, notice

Try your best not to judge or label what you're doing. Just notice every detail and trust the process.

2 Check your breathing

Your breath is the most important part of meditation. If you find your mind wandering, draw yourself back to the breath. This will help bring you back to the present moment.

3 Explore your senses

One of the best ways to get in the 'right here, right now' is through your senses. Senses are never in the past or future, so the more you notice them, the more mindful you become. What can you see, hear, smell, feel or taste?

4 Handle negative thoughts

If you can't seem to focus no matter what you do, try something different. Write down your thoughts. Go for a walk. Listen to music. Take a bath. You might just be putting too much pressure on yourself to relax.

5 Accept that it works

If you haven't tried meditation before, it's easy to sweep it under the 'weird-stuff' rug. Your goal should be not to understand or analyse the process, but to simply go with it. Meditation looks different for everyone. Find your way to connect with your inner self.

Find any way to help you get present. It doesn't matter what activity it is.

What is Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR)?

Autonomous sensory meridian response, otherwise known as ASMR is a scientific term for *brain tingling*. It most commonly starts on the scalp and travels down the back of the neck and upper spine, striking relaxation.

It usually comes about through a number of 'triggers' Mainly vocal and visual, here are a few things that may encourage ASMR:

- Listening to a softly spoken or whispering voice
- Listening to quiet, repetitive sounds resulting from someone engaging in a mundane task such as turning the pages of a book
- Watching somebody attentively execute a mundane task such as preparing food
- Receiving random, tender personal attention.

Try to think of ASMR not as some strange, hippie sensation. It's rather a bodily reaction that induces relaxation.

ASMR is similar to meditation, in that it helps us focus and relax, by turning off parts of the brain that are linked to stress and anxiety. Guided imagery, hypnosis and meditation are proven strategies to help encourage ASMR.

Two psychologists at Swansea University, Dr Nick Davis and Emma Barratt [interviewed 500 people](#) about their experience of ASMR. The study concluded that ASMR *"provides temporary relief in mood for those suffering from depression, with many individuals consciously using it for this purpose."* Many reported that they felt their mood and symptoms of pain improve.

We all go through periods of high stress, but this is particularly relevant for police officers.

Temporary states of depression may be present after experiencing a traumatic event at work. ASMR can be used to treat low moods and feeling down. Common in guided meditations, ASMR can be incorporated in your daily relaxation to help unwind and feel good.

**The power is inside you.
Unlock it, with meditation.**

Wearing that authority-figure badge comes with stress and pressure - more often than not the pressure, we put on ourselves. This affects our health, our families and our lives, well after we've clocked off.

Policing is a stressful job. And while that pressure won't stop, you can help control your body's reaction to it, through meditation. We've got family, children and friends' that also rely on us. Not just the Australian public.

Remember, you need to look after yourself first, before you can look after others.

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