

The Seven-Point Meditation Posture

Based on material from Kathleen McDonald, How to Meditate, Wisdom Publications, 1984.

Point 1: Legs

If possible, sit with your legs crossed in the vajra, or full lotus, position. In this position, each foot is placed, sole upward, on the thigh of the opposite leg. This position is difficult to achieve, but one can train the body to do so over time. This position gives the best support to the body and mind. It is not, however, essential.

An alternative position is the half-lotus position where one foot is on the floor under the opposite leg and the other foot is on top of the opposite thigh. A third alternative is simply sitting in a cross-legged position with both feet resting on the floor under the opposite thighs.

Sitting on a firm cushion that raises the buttocks higher than the knees can help you greatly to keep your spine straight. It can also help you to sit for longer periods of time without having your feet and legs fall asleep or get uncomfortable pins-and-needles.

If sitting on a cushion on the floor is not possible, one can use a low meditation bench. It is also perfectly acceptable to meditate while sitting on a chair. The most important thing is to find a suitable position in which you are able to be comfortable.

Point 2: Arms

Hold your hands loosely in your lap, right hand resting in the palm of your left, palms upward, thumbs lightly touching, forming the shape of a teardrop, or flame. Your hands should be resting about 2–3 inches below the navel. Shoulders and arms should be relaxed. Arms should be slightly akimbo, leaving a bit of space between your arms and your body to allow air to circulate. This helps to prevent sleepiness during meditation.

Point 3: Back

Your back is most important. It should be straight, held relaxed and fully upright, as if the vertebrae were a stack of blocks effortlessly resting in a pile. This helps your energy to flow freely and contributes greatly to the clarity and alertness of your mind in meditation. The position of your legs can contribute greatly to how easy it is to maintain a straight back; often the higher is the cushion under your buttocks and the lower are your knees, the easier it is to keep a straight back. You should experiment to see what works for you.

Point 4: Eyes

In the beginning, it is often easier to concentrate with your eyes fully closed. This is totally fine. As you gain some experience with meditation, it is recommended that you learn to leave your eyes slightly open to admit a little light and that you direct your gaze downwards, not really focusing on anything in particular. Closing the eyes completely may create a tendency toward sluggishness, sleep, or daydreaming, all of which are obstacles to clear meditations.

Point 5: Jaw and Mouth

Your jaw and mouth should be relaxed with your teeth slightly apart, not clenched, lips lightly touching.

Point 6: Tongue

Your tongue should rest lightly on your upper palate, with the tip lightly touching the back of the upper teeth. This reduces the flow of saliva and the need to swallow. These automatic bodily actions can be hindrances to deepening your concentration as they can become distractions.

Point 7: Head

Your head should be just slightly inclined forward so that your gaze is directed naturally toward the floor in front of you. If your chin is held too high, you may have problems with mental wandering and distraction. If you drop your head too far forward, this can bring mental dullness or sleepiness.