

Recovery Dharma: A Daily Meditation Practice for Newcomers

Why should addicts care about meditation?

Meditation has been widely demonstrated to help reduce stress, anxiety and depression - all of which are acknowledged to be major risk factors for addiction. The World Health Organisation estimates that several million people die because of addiction *every year*. And, every year, the lives of millions of other addicts - and the lives of their families - are destroyed or damaged as a consequence of unmanageable compulsions around harmful substances and behaviours.

The core of the Recovery Dharma ('dharma' means truth or reality) process is the daily practice of meditation. For many addicts, meditation is the great attractor to the RD program. The meditations at the heart of the RD program are versions of the practices devised by the Buddha over two and half thousand years ago. The Buddha believed that human suffering was caused by craving. Our attachment to people, things and experiences was, the Buddha saw, bound to result in disappointment and dissatisfaction.

Most people experience such cravings, but, in the case of the addict, they have got completely out of control. Very often, the addict is trying to suppress painful feelings that have resulted from previous trauma. Now dependent on substances and behaviours, the addict has become a 'hungry ghost', endlessly seeking relief in what cannot satisfy.

The Buddha's meditations are part of an overall process of healing and enlightenment. But, for the suffering addict, they are first and foremost a means to help manage craving and reduce the risk of relapse. Members of Recovery Dharma know from first-hand experience that these practices can play a critical role in developing a sustainable recovery. Recovery *is* possible. There is nothing to believe or doubt; there is nothing to which you have to sign up. There is just a practice, and a community to support that practice, if you want it.

How Do I Start?

Recovery Dharma is centred in what we call 'The Practice'. There are different ways to approach this process; but, in what follows, we set out a version of a schedule that has led to continued abstinence for addicts who had, for many years, been unable to stop relapsing, and were at risk of death from their addictions. The schedule here is primarily designed for those in active addiction who want clear guidance about how to get sober using Buddhist-inspired practices. Other approaches may be more appropriate for those who already have extended clean time and/or an understanding of the Buddha's teachings. Once you have set an intention to stop using or acting out, we suggest that you take time familiarising and grounding yourself with some core meditations. We also encourage you to engage in the work that can lead to healing insight about your addiction – ideally including regular contact with a therapeutic professional.

The First Month: 12 Minutes per day

- [Breath Meditation](#): 12 Minutes per day.

Attention to the breath is the fundamental Buddhist meditation practice. For addicts, development of the skill of concentration – in this case concentration on the breath - can often be life transforming. We may, for the first time, discover a non-harmful way to quieten the painful chaos of our minds. During this time, we also encourage you attend as many RD meetings as you can, whether in person or online. If you can, you should also try to read the book *Recovery Dharma* (find a PDF on the website).

Month Two to Month Six: 20 Minutes per day

- [Forgiveness Meditation](#): 20 minutes per day

During this period, continue practicing breath meditation, and expand your practice through daily forgiveness meditation. Self-loathing and resentment at others are both very frequent triggers for relapse, especially in early recovery. They are also common features of most addicts' emotional lives. It is crucial to have a means of handling the emotions generated by resentment, and the forgiveness practice provides this. We further suggest that, in addition to attending meetings, you establish a relationship with a Recovery Dharma 'Wise Friend' or mentor, to assist you in starting to work through the 'Inquiries and Investigations' in the book *Recovery Dharma*.

Month Seven to Month Twelve: 30 Minutes per day

- [Breath Meditation](#): 12 Minutes per day
- [Forgiveness Meditation](#): 20 Minutes several times a week
- [First Foundation of Mindfulness - Breath and Body](#): 24 Minutes several times a week
- [Meditation for Sitting with Difficult Emotions](#): 23 Minutes several times a week

Having gotten some grounding in the breath and forgiveness meditations, we suggest that (while continuing with breath and forgiveness) you add the 'Mindfulness of Breath and Body' and 'Meditation for Sitting with Difficult Emotions' to your regular practice. The intention here is to develop the conscious capacity to experience and tolerate sensations and emotions in the body. Addicts often find themselves to be helplessly reactive. A word, image or situation can set off a what seems like an unstoppable chain of devastating events. The process by which this happens is often a mystery to the addict. These meditations can help the addict to sit more easily with their feelings, to pay attention to their reactions with wise detachment: to care and not to care. You are also encouraged to continue attending and offering service at meetings; and to complete the 'Inquiries and Investigations' with your 'Wise Friend' or mentor.

Year Two and Beyond: 40 Minutes per day

- [Other Recovery Dharma meditations](#)

You should now have an established meditation practice in place. If so, and if you have completed the 'Inquiries and Investigations', you are encouraged to extend your practice to include the other meditations in the RD program, including the remaining foundations of mindfulness and the heart practices. These meditations can hugely expand the range of what it

is possible to understand and feel: by changing our relationship to our minds and hearts, they can become a doorway to wisdom and compassion. It is a path to the freedom for which all addicts long. In our experience, though, they can be quite demanding mentally and emotionally for those in active addiction. This is why we recommend having a year's abstinence before beginning these practices. But, practiced properly and at the right time, they will consolidate your recovery and bring you joy. We also suggest that you continue to check in regularly with your 'Wise Friend' or mentor; and, just as importantly, encourage you to offer yourself to others as a 'Wise Friend' or mentor. This service will greatly benefit your recovery.

Meditation and Addiction

Meditation is the opposite of addiction. When using or acting out, we are usually seeking a state of pleasant oblivion: we want to feel pleasure, but without understanding or awareness. We are often motivated by a desire to suppress painful thoughts we cannot bear to bring to mind. Meditation does not allow this process to take place in the way in which addicts have come to rely. As one relapsing member put in meetings, 'meditation has totally fucked up my using!'. Meditation encourages us to turn towards pain, to learn to tolerate and explore it, and to respond to it with non-judgemental compassion. The resulting freedom is extraordinary; but it does not permit our old – and self-destroying – trick of checking out and shutting down. The practice has a cumulative effect – a softening of the heart and an expansion of the mind. The addict can find what they need, this time with eyes wide open.

You can find scripts for various meditations on the website.