

Free Mindfulness Apps Worthy of Your Attention

Mindfulness apps are trending in a big way. Here are three we're happy we downloaded.

By Stephany Tlalka

Stop, Breathe & Think

Available for iPhone and Android



This app offers a solid sampling of the basics of meditation, featuring a range of exercises at varying lengths (mindfulness meditation, loving-kindness meditation, the body scan practice), ideal for short practices at work and longer sessions at home. The non-profit Tools for Peace originally created the app for students and staff in their kindness and compassion programs, but the app's popularity in the app store has taken SBT to a more mainstream crowd.

Mindfulness apps are notorious for having a questionable “emotional check-in” component where you're asked to input your emotions—then the app spits out some kind of progress report based on whether you've clicked enough smiley faces that week or month. But this app harnesses that emotional component much more effectively by asking you to input how you feel, mentally and physically comprehensively, and then suggests a variety of meditation practices based on your response.

The look and feel of the app is very accessible, with plain-English explanations of what meditation is and how to do it, and with a bit of humor weaved into the whole project—SBT recently posted a video to Twitter entitled “Here's k.d. Lang using the Stop, Breathe & Think app.” The pop and country superstar—who has been promoting the app alongside Tools for Peace—is featured, and the video consists of her sitting infinitely still for a whole minute. When you're browsing the app, the practices don't feel like homework so much as a nice foray into something a little different.

Unexpected surprise: for a small fee, you can download a pack of meditations narrated by k.d. Lang.

Calm

Available for iPhone and Android



Calm evolved out of Calm.com, a free web app where users could select background scenery and sounds (sunny seaside with crashing waves is one selection), set a timer, and chill out for a few minutes. Now, in app form, Calm consists of a “7 Steps to Calm” guide as well as its seaside offerings.

The “7 Steps to Calm” was a bit too long, and instructions were vague at times. For instance, the step about posture veers into an impromptu discussion on how “we're so busy doing that we forget about being” that you're not really learning about posture anymore. If you listen to all 7 steps at once, repetitious language became annoying (The phrase “Feel the tension melt away” came up more than once). Calm is not ideal for learning meditation, but it is good for catching a few blissful moments to do absolutely nothing.

One major logistical pet peeve: the app lets you access the 7 steps and one calm practice, but shows you a long list of other practices you have to purchase to unlock. There were more locked practices available than unlocked.

Mindfulness Training App

Available for iPhone



Created by Sounds True, a major publisher of meditation books, audio and other media, this app gives you a taste of teachings from key mindfulness instructors, including Jon Kabat-Zinn, the pioneer of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Jack Kornfield, Tara Brach, and others. If you're new to meditation, this app is a great opportunity to get a more intimate understanding of what it's all about. Seasoned practitioners might be drawn to the extra talks available on the app concerning the science of mindfulness, varying definitions surrounding the practice, neuroplasticity, and happiness.

One small issue: app navigation is a bit clunky. You have to play the first practice before you can navigate to a screen that shows you the six meditation practices you can select from.

Honorable mention: Headspace, spearheaded by meditation teacher Andy Puddicombe. This slickly designed app provides ten-minute meditation sessions, with the first ten days available free of charge. If you've never tried meditation, Andy's easy banter and relatable instruction will make the practice more accessible. You might find that it takes you more than ten days to get through the first ten practices.

Reader's mentioned: Insight Timer, a meditation timer that doubles as a mindfulness guide. Users can share their meditation times with their friends and check in on others users meditating in the area. But readers came for the guided meditations hosted on the app, from well-known teachers like Sharon Salzberg, Jack Kornfield, and Mindful's mental health blogger Elisha Goldstein. A timer that also teaches you how to meditate is a perfect pairing.

Insight Timer - Meditation Timer

By Bradley Fullmer

Open iTunes to buy and download apps.



Description

With beautiful Tibetan singing bowls and a dynamic worldwide meditation community, Insight Timer is the fun, connected way to support your meditation practice.