

**THE SILENT TREATMENT**

# WHY MEDITATION COULD BE JUST WHAT YOUR GAME NEEDS

BY BOB CARNEY



mindfulness meditation – staying quietly in the present – has been shown to increase creativity, the ability to manage pain and the power to relieve anxiety. For golfers, the last one might be most important.

There are as many kinds of meditation as there are coffees at Starbucks.

Some meditators focus on numbers, phrases or mantras.

They even meditate as they walk, counting footfalls.

Some sit quietly and concentrate on the sounds around them.

To start, keep it simple: Sit upright, close your eyes and focus on your breath – the flow of air, the expansion of your chest in and out.

When your mind wanders, notice that, and bring it back to your breath.

“It’ll take about two breaths before the thoughts start,” laughs Tour pro Luke Donald, who says returning to meditation in 2014 helped him recover control over his mind-set and mood at a time when he was in a freefall from his No. 1 ranking.

You don’t need shrines, special rooms or lotus pillows.

“The easier, the more portable, the more practical, the better,” says Dan Harris, whose on-air panic attack on “Good Morning America” more than a decade ago led to 10% Happier, a book about his experience.

Wherever you do it, try to do it regularly, say, 10 minutes a day.

Donald says his new strategy is three little sessions of five minutes each day.

Psychologist Michael Gervais, whose clients include Donald and the Seattle Seahawks, says

the point isn’t just awareness.

It’s insight. “For some golfers, the ultimate insight might be: It’s just a game. But you start by becoming aware of your emotions, body sensations and the unfolding environment.”

Harris talks about “investigating” what you notice and feel.

“Practising mindfulness helps you lean into feelings, accept them rather than fight them,” he says. “That’s when the magic happens.”

Naturally there are apps for this. Some “game” the process, allowing you to measure how long you focus before your mind wanders.

## NEGATIVE THOUGHTS MIGHT NOT VANISH, BUT THEIR POWER SHOULD.

Check out Headspace, Muse, Harris’ 10% Happier and Opti-Brain, an app built on the Muse software by Arizona State sport psychology consultant Debbie Crews.

She put brain-wave-measuring headbands on teachers at last year’s PGA show, demonstrating how much better they putted when they got their brainwaves to a resting state.

So now...sit up straight. Close your eyes. Take a deeeeeep breath...and let the birdies come.

## FIVE PAYOFFS FOR GOLFERS

**1 NOTICE NEGATIVE THOUGHTS** without being run by them. I gag over bunker shots might be a thought that never leaves you, but its power over you should.

**2 DELAY REACTION TO STRESS.** “Think of road rage,” says Tour pro Luke Donald, who has worked with psychologist Michael Gervais and George Mumford, author of The Mindful Athlete. “Something happens. You react. There are moments like that in golf. The idea is to extend the gap between feeling and reaction. Give the urge to react time to dissipate.”

**3 STOP FIGHTING WHAT YOU FEEL.** “It’s not about feeling good. It’s about feeling what you feel, and not running from it,” says Dan Harris, author of 10% Happier.

**4 BE. HERE. NOW.** “You hit a shot and take a few moments to evaluate – not judge – it,” Gervais says. “You say, ‘OK, this happened and this happened and that happened.’ After that, the idea is to simply be where your feet are. Enjoy the walk.”

**5 REHEARSE SUCCESS.** Some psychologists go as far as encouraging players to imagine a whole round in a kind of meditative state. See success. Invite success.

Illustration by Brian Cronin