

Posture for Meditation

The most important things about meditation posture are:

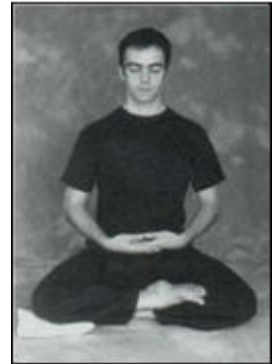
- Finding a posture that allows us to be comfortable for the time we are sitting (we could say, a posture that allows us to be kind to ourselves)
- Finding a posture that allows us to stay alert and aware (we could say, a posture that captures the spirit of the practice that we are doing)
- Finding a posture that keeps us stable for the duration of the meditation – in practice this usually means having three points of contact with the ground (either our seat and our two feet or our seat and our two knees etc)

Although meditators are often depicted in sitting down on the floor in the full lotus position, this is not necessary for meditation (although some people do use it and find it beneficial) and there are many different postures that people use to meditate.

1. **Sitting cross- legged:**

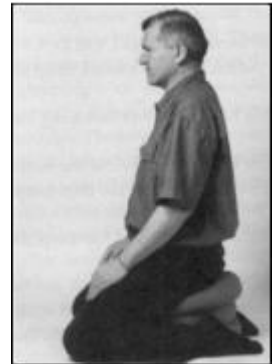
There are many ways to sit cross- legged, including the full- lotus, half- lotus and tailor positions. They all have the same underlying principles, which is to keep the meditator grounded, well supported and comfortable.

In the photo, we can see that the meditator has placed a blanket under one of his knees so that he is stable, and to avoid straining his other knee. His hands are supported by another cushion, so that his neck and shoulders aren't over stretched. He looks relaxed and naturally upright rather than slumped or over- arched.



2. **Kneeling:**

If you find it difficult to sit cross- legged, kneeling using cushions or a stool can be a good option. The posture is more symmetrical than sitting cross- legged, which can make it easier on the joints, while still allowing you to sit on the ground, which many meditators prefer. In the photo, the meditator is not slumped as a result of a very low seat, and does not have an over- pronounced hollow in his back caused by a high seat, but is naturally upright. If he found that his neck and shoulders were hurting after a period of sitting, he could try supporting his hands with a blanket or cushion.



3. **Sitting on a chair:**

Sometimes, when people start mediating, they can feel that it is necessary to contort themselves into an uncomfortable meditation posture because it is how we often see meditators or Buddhists portrayed. It is important to remember to be kind to ourselves in meditation (and everywhere else!), and meditating in a chair may well be part of that if we find it difficult to meditate sitting on the floor. To sit upright without having to lean on the chair or hold himself rigidly, the meditator in the photo has raised his rear chair legs by a couple of cm. At the Nottingham Buddhist Centre, our



shrine room chairs have been modified in this way too, and it is possible to do the same to any dining chair etc at home. The meditator has also placed some blankets under his feet to prevent his legs from dangling, and his hands are supported on his legs.

A troubleshooting guide:

The best way to improve your posture is to get someone else who has some experience of meditation to look at your posture and give you tips, but your body will also let you know if something is not quite right via a bit of discomfort. Here are some common aches and pains we can get when we start meditating and some suggestions of things we can try that might help:

Discomfort	Possible Cause	Suggestion
Tingling/ numbness in lower legs	Seat too low	Try adding another cushion if you are kneeling. If you're sitting cross-legged, this might be an issue of flexibility, and it could be best to try kneeling instead.
Tension in the neck/ shoulders	Slumping	Try adding another cushion to raise your seat a little. You can also try imagining a thread going from the crown of your head to the ceiling to check out whether you are slumping forward. If you're kneeling you can also try moving your knees a bit further apart to tilt your pelvis forward. If you're cross- legged, make sure you're sitting toward the front of the cushion.
Pinching pain in the lower back	Over arching	Your seat may be a bit too high, which is causing you to arch your back to prevent you falling forward. Try taking a cushion away.
Pain in one knee	Asymmetry (one knee taking more weight)	If you're sitting cross legged, make sure both knees are well supported, and if one is not quite on the ground, place a thin cushion or blanket underneath. If you're kneeling, make sure your seat is in the centre of your cushions.
Tension between shoulder blades	Unsupported hands	Try supporting your hands with a blanket wrapped around your waist or a cushion. This will stop your shoulders taking all of the weight.
Pain in the jaw/ forehead	Emotional tension/ stress	This one is usually much less to do with physical posture and more to do with what we have brought with us to the sit. Lots of stress can make us raise our eyebrows or clench our jaws. If you notice tension in the face, sometimes just a relaxed awareness of it can cause it to dissipate.

And finally, a note about laying down...

Sometimes, people look at this and think that laying down might be the best way for them to meditate. It's impossible to slump or over- arch, it's comfortable, and it gets us very relaxed, what's not to like? However, we can often find that laying down to meditate, especially at certain times of the day, can make us very sleepy, and it can be difficult to remain alert and aware during a meditation. For that reason, during the metta bhavana and the mindfulness of breathing, most people choose to meditate upright, and I would advise you to try that too.

Of course, for some people with certain health conditions, laying down is the only way to meditate comfortably, but for most, staying upright will be the best way to combine comfort and alertness.