

PERSONAL TECH

# The Smartphone Way to Inner Calm

App Smart

By KIT EATON    MAY 4, 2016

OUR busy modern lifestyles have a million wicked tricks for increasing stress, including the repeated pings and buzzes of our smartphones. But with the right app, a smartphone can actually be a tool to help reduce stress and find calm.

One such app is **Headspace**, which is all about guided meditation. A narrator talks through a mental exercise and meditation session intended to help meet a goal, such as reducing stress or coping with anxiety.

The guided meditation can be a series, which contains several mediation sessions that last from a few minutes to as long as an hour. There are also single sessions to help with a particular problem, like managing a panic or anxiety attack. You just choose a meditation session, make yourself comfortable, pop on some headphones, hit play and let the soothing narration change your state of mind.

The app is easy to use, with minimalist controls and a straightforward interface. The narrator's voice reminded me of being read to at night when I was a child. The language used is also easy to understand, dispensing with the mumbo jumbo that some meditation apps use.

You do have to commit to using the app regularly to make the most of it, which may not be easy for everyone. To help keep people on track, the app logs a user's progress by filling in a graphic as a session is completed, which can be motivating.

Headspace is available on **Android** and **iOS**. It includes a limited number of sessions free; for access to more, the subscription fee is \$13 a month.

**Calm**, from **calm.com**, is a guided meditation app that is simpler in terms of features and menus than Headspace, and more relaxing in its look and feel. Its main feature is the ability to choose the theme that is seen and heard during a meditation narration, with a long list of options like “coastline at sunset” or “fireplace.” An attractively filmed video then runs in a loop on the screen, accompanied by a soothing soundtrack.

Calm’s design and the language in each guided meditation is simple and unfussy. The length of some guided meditation sessions can be chosen to suit the time available, from two minutes to around half an hour.

The free version of Calm contains a surprising amount of content. A premium subscription costs \$10 a month, or \$40 a year, and provides longer meditation programs. Calm is available on **iOS** and **Android**.

Another technique for maintaining inner balance is to keep a journal. The \$3 **iOS** app **Gratitude Journal** by Happy Tapper puts an extra spin on this idea by encouraging you to make journal entries that focus on things you are grateful for on a particular day. The app has a brightly designed interface, with clear controls and a layout that make it easy to type a few sentences that talk about what you are thankful for.

You can rate each day using a five-star system and include photos or videos. The app automatically appends a quick weather summary for your location so that when you read back through previous entries, you can get a sense for how the weather influences your mood or experiences. There is an option to protect your entries with a code, to keep prying eyes away from personal matters, or you can share an entry on social media if you want to be open.

Lastly, the **Pacifica** app is a bit of a Swiss army knife for relaxation because it combines many different techniques. The app includes a mood tracker (awareness of how your moods fluctuate can help you gain control over them) and a health tracker, alongside guided meditation audio tracks to help with different problems. It also has

chat groups on various topics to discuss concerns or experiences, as well as a community section to share tips with other users, such as movies that lift you up or inspiring quotations.

The app, available on iOS and Android, includes a limited amount of free content . You can unlock the rest for \$4 a month or \$30 a year.

## Quick Call

**Galaxia**, a novel social networking app, has been available on iOS for a while, but now it is also hitting Android devices. Unlike well-known public social networks like Twitter or Facebook, Galaxia lets you create miniature private social networks open only to invitees. Try out its basic features free.

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