



Many people struggle with what's often known as the "monkey mind" – racing thoughts and feeling restless or confused. The monkey mind part of your brain becomes easily distracted, and it can be difficult to control when it insists on being heard.

Finding stillness through meditation and yoga may be the solution when you need to quiet your inner critic and cultivate more calm and focus in your daily life.

Lauren Lewey, an instructor at Firefly Community Yoga, says increased mental and emotional clarity is possible by reconnecting with your body and breath.

"The mind is a stressful thought machine. We're thinking about the past or worrying about the future, wondering if we're making the right or wrong decisions, and worrying about what we should be doing,

"It's overwhelming. You can quiet that inner critical voice with yoga and meditation and live in a more relaxed state of being," Lewey says.

At Firefly, students are taught to focus on their breathing while doing yoga sequences. Instructors don't use music during classes.

"Our society is so addicted to entertainment, iPhones, social media and constant noise. Silence can be healing," Lewey adds.

A 2011 World Health

Organization report called noise pollution a "modern plague," stating that "there is overwhelming evidence that exposure to environmental noise has adverse effects on the health of the population."

When you live in a relaxed presence and tune out some of society's noise, you'll learn to rely on your intuition which can make decisions easier and give you more self-confidence.

"Whether you call it intuition, gut feelings, God or something else, with that connection, life becomes more peaceful and you trust the deeper knowing within yourself."

Rutgers University published a story in 2016 that found a combination of meditation and aerobic exercise reduced symptoms of depression by 40 percent. The study participants improved their ability to focus and were less susceptible to feeling overwhelmed and anxious. They were also less likely to ruminate about the past.

Other benefits of meditation and yoga can include:

- Improved flexibility and mobility
- Weight loss
- Stronger core muscles
- Less back pain
- Less pain from rheumatoid arthritis
- Relief from asthma symptoms

# Healing a monkey mind



By Patricia Surrett, Editor



- Improved heart health and lower blood pressure
- Improved digestion
- Better sleep
- Better mood
- Fewer migraines

What can you expect at your first class? At Firefly, the instructors begin by teaching students to consciously connect with their breath while doing yoga postures. Lewey says the yoga moves can be modified to fit your abilities.

“I’ve had classes where students ranged from teens to people in their 70s,” Lewey adds. “We have men and women in our classes.”

Classes last an hour and 15 minutes. You should wear loose, comfortable clothing that will allow you to move freely. Bring a yoga mat, hand towel and water. Be patient as you learn the poses, alignment and flow of the class.

“You’ll feel benefits after the first class. I’ve had students who say



they’re sleeping better after two or three sessions. If you’re going to class three times a week, after a month you’ll see a shift in the way you’re interacting with life. You won’t be as reactive or nervous. It’s life changing.”

Firefly Community Yoga is in the Enterprise Recreation Center. Classes are \$5 per session. If you can’t afford the fee, the instructors will work with you on the cost. To

learn more about Firefly Community Yoga, visit [www.ffyoga.org](http://www.ffyoga.org). You can also find them on Facebook: @ffyoga.

If you want to start with the basics of meditation, you can learn to relax, clear your mind and connect with your breath with free guided meditations. Headspace offers a free 10-day course; sessions last 10 minutes per day. It’s available in the App Store or Google Play.