



How to Meditate While You Play Poker

by Tommy Angelo

Let's talk about secretly supercharging yourself right in the middle of your poker sessions so that you'll feel better, and therefore play better, and therefore feel even better. It's simple to do, but hard, and that's a recipe for frustration because even though you'll probably want to try this stuff, you probably won't.

Was that a dare? A throw-down? An unprovoked act of aggression from a mission-driven pen-wielder? Yes to all. Let's begin...

Meditation refers to sitting in one spot for an extended period, stock still. *Poker* also refers to sitting in one spot for an extended period. But to play poker, you do have to move. So you can't play poker and meditate at the same time. However you *can* practice mindfulness during poker, and by doing so you can enjoy the benefits of meditation right there at the poker table. If you make yourself aware of only what is transpiring around you and inside you – then you'll be able to...

Okay. We'll get to that. But first, there's a void to fill.

When we make ourselves aware of only what is transpiring around us and inside us, what do we call it? Mindfulness? Awareness? Those clunky words take too long to say, and to type. We can do better.

I'm going to use *med*, *medded*, and *medding* to mean any act of mindfulness. (I used *meditation* in the title because you didn't know about the word *medding* yet.) I'll also use the naturally-occurring spinoffs, for example:

I am a medder who meds between ds because medding makes me money.

What you'll need

To med during poker, online or live, you'll need these three things: intention, stillness, and a playlist.



Intention means you intend to remember to still yourself. Stillness is a temporary cessation of motion. And your playlist is whatever you choose to do next with your limbs, your lungs, and your mind, after you stop moving.

Medding during poker is like...

Medding during poker is like a child's game. No competing. No scorecard. It's just you. And you're making it up the whole time. To play is to win.

Medding during poker is like a science lab. There are no bad experiments or bad results. There's just science on the move. To tinker is to win.

Medding during poker is like playing music all alone. Anything goes. And nobody knows.

It's a freeroll

When you make a bet and the only possible outcomes are that you'll win or break even, that's a freeroll. We like freerolls. Medding is a freeroll. You'll never hear anyone say they took up medding and it made things worse.

Benefits

These practices undo unease. They break spells, untie knots, and dispel fog. They uncover the best version of you, over and over and over.

Let's look at three of the big-picture benefits of medding:

- Feeling better
- Training at feeling better
- Satisfaction



Feeling better

Think of your mind as a garden full of seeds. Some of them – such as kindness and gratitude – bloom into smiles. Others – let's call them tilt seeds – grow into frowns of frustration, bitterness, envy, and so on.

Such a variety of seeds, with one thing in common. If you give them water and sunshine, they'll grow. If you don't, they won't.

An obnoxious player sucks out on you. You feel the resentment germinating. What if you could choose to not water that seed?

You're card-dead, again. What if this time you send no sunshine to that dangerous corner of your garden where the seeds of boredom and impatience lie in wait?

Pepper your sessions with stillness and take charge of your garden. Nourish the good seeds and starve the rest. Reduce your unhappiness on the spot by choosing what to do with your mind. This is a trainable skill.

Training

Medding is the longest game you'll ever play. Which is good because it takes a while to get good at it. By "get good at it" I mean "do it a lot."

Before you can med, you have to remember to med – each time. Yeah, that seems obvious. I'm stating it because medding is easy, but remembering to med is really, really hard. Good training means you work on the hard stuff. To train at medding, you train at remembering.

Medding is a two-step process. First you think...

Hey! I think I'll do some medding now!

And then...

What splendid song shall I select from my playlist this time?



At first, you'll barely remember to do any medding, and when you do, it'll be weird. Until it isn't. Each act of mindfulness serves as training for the next time and the next and the next.

Get creative with your reminders. Keep new notes in your pocket. Use the timer on your phone or watch. Leave something intentionally out of place in your chip-stack area to remind you to med. Ask a poker buddy to join you on this path and send each other text reminders. And you might want to print this article out now, and leave it lying around for a few years, as a reminders trove.

Satisfaction

Half the fun of doing well for ourselves is knowing we're doing well for ourselves. When I reach over the donuts to grab an apple from the back of the breakfast bar, I feel good already, just from having made my best play. Medding is like that.

How to med while you play poker

You're shuffling chips, and you notice it, and you stop, for the sake of stillness. Or you bring your hands together, to raise body awareness. Or you stop breathing for a few beats. Those are examples of medding songs, for your playlist.

I've compiled a starter-library for you. It's mostly classics, arranged into three genres: live poker, online poker, and mindful breathing.

Mindful breathing

Breath awareness causes physical changes, such as increased oxygenation, and mental changes, such as thought removal, that then cause upticks in vibrancy, calmness, and other desirables.

Just as huge as that is this:

A mindful breath is never not available because you are never not breathing.

Your next mindful breath is always right there for the taking. And one breath is all it takes to create a wedge of awareness. Then you aim your awareness at whatever you please: at sounds, opponents, your posture, more mindful breaths, whatever.



A mindful breath is...

A mindful breath is a breath during which you know whether you are breathing in or breathing out.

A mindful breath is a breath during which you know whether you are breathing through your nose or through your mouth.

A mindful breath is a breath during which you know if the breath is shallow or deep.

A mindful breath is a breath during which you know if the breath is short or long.

When you know anything at all about your current breath, you are breathing mindfully. And all mindful breathing is medding. It never just happens on its own. That's why it's hard. And that's why it helps.

Narrate your breathing. Silently, to yourself. Let your mind recite these words in sync with the rising and falling of your abdomen. The meaning of the mantra helps you stay focused throughout the breath, and the pacing serves to slow you down just right.

Breathing in, I am aware I am breathing in.

Breathing out, I am aware I am breathing out.

This practice is older than Doyle.

The other breath-narration you'll need is just two words:

In... Out...

Use your nose. Inhale through your nose to filter, warm, and moisten all of the air that enters your lungs. Mouth-breathing, by comparison, is dirty, cold, and dry. To improve your breathing, shut your mouth.

Nose-breathing is gentle and mouth-breathing is harsh, and that's why animals with noses breath almost exclusively through the nose. Even a sprinting cheetah keeps their mouth shut. As do all sleeping animals, except humans. We do lots of mouth-breathing, day and night. But the only time we need to is when we're gasping for air



or our nose isn't working right. (If those words piqued your curiosity, I recommend the book *Breath* by James Nestor.)

As to poker and noses and medding, when you breathe through your nose on purpose, your cells will thank you, and you'll be medding.

Use your belly. Sometimes we breath into the lower lungs and sometimes the upper. We use the upper lungs when we are in a state of unease and we use the lower lungs when we are calm and restful. The autonomic nervous system decides this for us, unless we decide to decide for ourselves.

By belly-breathing on purpose – by smoothly drawing air into your lower lungs using only your diaphragm – you quickly convince your body that everything is fine. Then your body relays that message to your mind. And now you're back to your A-game.

It won't always go quite like that. But the more you do it, the more it might.

Count your breaths. How many? Three is a good number. Or ten. Or a hundred for that matter. Whatever you decide, you have to start at one. That's the all-important toggle – from zero mindful breaths to one. Back and forth we medders go, between mindless and mindful, as often as possible.

Stop breathing. Instruct your diaphragm and rib cage to not move. That's it. This is a fine mindfulness practice. Breathe totally normally, and then, stop breathing. For optimal stillness, pause your breath during an exhale. Short stoppages are lovely.

The mindful-breathing scorecard. I'm sorry, did I say no scorecards? What I meant was no scorecards required. Which is not the same as no scorecards allowed.

For you scorekeeping types – and I hugely am one – you most definitely can attempt to track your mindful breaths, and I strongly encourage it. For every inhale you are aware of, you score one point. For every exhale you are aware of, you score one point. The object of the game is to score higher than before. The time unit is your call. You might shoot for a higher score today than yesterday. Or a higher score during the next ten minutes than the previous ten.



The bad news, as to scientific validity, is that it's impossible to stay focused on your breathing, which means you can't keep track of when you lose track, so there's no way to know your ratio of mindful-breaths to mindless-breaths. But you *can* know that the ratio is going up over time because you'll be right there doing it and you'll just know. And that's really all you're after: to keep raising your percentage of mindful breaths, forever.

Here's the math of medding. Results are proportional to effort. A little helps a little and a lot helps a lot.

Online poker

Sit up. This is the lowest-hanging fruit in the medding orchard. There's no single action that rates to be more beneficial to more people, more often, than straightening the spine. Attention to posture requires no training or education. There really is nothing to it but to do it.

Stand up. Then walk behind your chair and place your hands on it and do a squat. Or stand tall and stretch your arms to the ceiling. Or do standing twists. Or all the above or any other exercise or stretch. And while that's going on, narrate your breathing... in... out.

If you do stretchy bendy stuff without the breathing, that's great, but not optimally great. For that, you need to add breath awareness. Then all your movements become high-yield medding.

Sit out. Your computer chair is just a chair and you're allowed to just sit on it. You don't have to be going full-blast all the time. When you feel fatigued and you know you need a break, but you don't want to stand up, try resting in place. Quit or sit out on all tables. Darken your screen. And just chill in your chair. Call it revitalization. Call it flexing your patience muscle. Call it time well spent. It's all of that.

Countdowns. You just shoved, and your opponent's clock is counting down. If you take up medding, you'll see this as an opportunity to waylay your thinking and wave hello to your neglected body, by sitting up straight and narrating a breath or two.



Live poker

In between hands. Live poker was made for medding. We sit for hours and we're mostly not playing poker, we're watching poker. You've heard of *carpe diem*? This is *carpe gappem*. After you fold before the flop, seize the gap, and attach your attention to the herenow. Hold your gaze on a chip. Or place your feet flat. Or lift your drink to your mouth using both hands. Or note your mood. Or follow a breath. So much to do, and plenty of time to do it.

Tanking. You shove the turn. Your opponent tanks. Intensity spikes. As a medder, you'll have two options at this point. You could do the usual thing – which is un-monitored thinking and feeling. Or you could seize the gap and instead of letting your mind yammer on like a runaway sentence you could send the universe down a different path this time and *carpe gappem* to steady yourself for whatever comes next which could in fact be you getting stacked so you might as well...

Breathing in, I am aware I am breathing in.

Breathing out, I am aware I am breathing out.

Ah, much better.

And then there's all the tanking you have to sit through when you're not in the hand. What a prime time to play a medding song and reboot your inner OS. Or you can water the seeds of impatience. Your choice.

The sound of poker. Hello chippies my old friend. I've come to hear you once again. And the chatter. And the loudspeaker. You've heard of *stop and smell the roses*? This is *stop and smell the noises*. The sound of poker is always there, but we do have to listen for it or we don't hear it. And then it sounds kinda cool.

Sit up straight. This bears repeating. Align your spine for profit and health. Sitting up straight raises your energy and your awareness. No schooling required. More is more.

My intention is to be sitting up straight at the start of every hand. If I'm not, no biggie. When I throw a rock at a tree, there's no shame in missing. I just pick up another rock.

Here's a song to add to your sitting-repertoire for sure: mindful slouching. I think by now you can figure out what that means.

If your chair is uncomfortable, don't blame the chair. Instead, adjust. Adjust your body, and adjust your attitude, using mindful-breathing and thought-witnessing and straight-spining and whatever else, however many times it takes, until the complaining subsides. When it returns, repeat the squelching process. Eventually you'll be at peace with all chairs.

Auto-replay

As with poker, your diligence and intelligence are integral to the improvement process, where curiosity and experimentation lead to understanding. Keep tweaking your songs and modifying your playlists until you can't wait to play them again. When you get to where your favorite songs are set on auto-replay, then you can declare victory over the medding game. Everything after that is just victory laps.

And so it begins...

Even though you'll probably want to try this stuff, you probably won't.

Okay, I admit. That was uncalled for, and I apologize. What I really meant was: I do hope you try this stuff, and I hope you're glad you did. In nugget form...

Medding is...

Medding is toggling – between mindless and mindful.

Medding is improvising – because you have no choice.

Medding is noticing – first this, and then that.

The three things...

To the table bring intention, stillness, and a playlist.

Intention is about strategizing and remembering.

Stillness is about less movement, less sound, just less.

And your playlist is about to start. Happy medding!



If you're a meditator, or you want to be, this book is for you... *Dailyness: How to Sustain a Meditation practice.*

<https://www.amazon.com/Dailyness-How-Sustain-Meditation-Practice/dp/0996464867>

My coaching services: <https://www.tommyangelo.com/poker-guidance/>

I tweet thoughtful words every day: <https://twitter.com/TheTommyAngelo>

I love email: tommy@tommyangelo.com

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