# **How to Be a More Patient Person**

By: [Anna Goldfarb](https://www.nytimes.com/by/anna-goldfarb) Nov. 5, 2018 *New York Times*

**Directions:** Your “meditation” this week is to reflect on your patience.

1. Read the article and annotate it in the small right-hand margin.   
2. Underline the tips that could be most effective in helping you develop more patience.

3. Where in your life can YOU make some changes to be more patient?

Defintion: Suss = To realize or grasp something

Relax. It’s going to be O.K.

My jaw clenches when Hulu videos buffer. I huff and puff when stuck in a sluggish line at a coffee shop. Slow cars in the fast lane send me into a curse-filled tizzy. I’m ashamed how quickly I lose my cool over these minor things. I’ve often wished I could be a more patient person, but it’s overwhelming to know where to start.

Patience, the ability to keep calm in the face of disappointment, distress or suffering, is worth cultivating. The virtue is associated with a variety of positive health outcomes, such as [reducing depression and other negative emotions](http://psycnet.apa.org/record/2007-08907-011). Researchers have also [concluded](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254336846_An_examination_of_patience_and_well-being) that patient people exhibit more prosocial behaviors like empathy, and were more likely to display generosity and compassion.

A 2012 [study](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254336846_An_examination_of_patience_and_well-being) in the Journal of Positive Psychology identified three distinct expressions of patience:   
1. Interpersonal, which is maintaining calm when dealing with someone who is upset, angry or being a pest.   
2. Life hardships or finding the silver lining after a serious setback.   
3. Daily hassles, which is suppressing annoyance at delays or anything irritating that would inspire a snarky tweet.

The good news is that same study found that patience as a personality trait is modifiable. Even if you’re not a particularly patient person today, there’s still hope you can be a more patient person tomorrow. So if you find yourself getting exasperated more than you’d like, here are ways to keep those testy impulses in check.

**Identify your trigger(s)**Impatience is the “fight” component of the fight-or-flight response, according to [M.J. Ryan](http://www.mj-ryan.com/), executive coach and author of [The Power of Patience: How This Old-Fashioned Virtue Can Improve Your Life](http://www.amazon.com/Power-Patience-Old-Fashioned-Virtue-Improve/dp/1573245992/). “That’s why you’re honking at people or annoyed in the line or whatever it is you’re doing that’s your impatient behavior,” she said.

Amygdalae are the culprit. This almond-shaped set of nervous tissue in our brains is responsible for sussing out threats and regulating emotions. While this component of the limbic system is perfectly calibrated for protecting our ancestors from ferocious predators, it’s not as adept at determining credible threats in modern life.

As a result, many react to irritating situations as if these encounters were more dire than they actually are. The amygdala, Ms. Ryan said, is too unsophisticated to know the difference

between a true danger (say, a growling tiger) and something substantially less life-threatening (dealing with an obnoxious person).

Figure out which situations set you off — careless drivers, technological glitches, slow-moving cashiers, etc. — and you’re already on your way to taking control.

**Interrupt the cycle and evaluate the risk**Next, think about what thought or suspicion sets off the alarm bells in your brain.

“There’s something that you’re either saying to yourself, an image you have, a feeling in your body that is triggering that response, that you’re under threat,” Ms. Ryan said.

Once you figure out what you’re telling yourself about the situation — “I can’t be bothered to wait in this line,” for example — then you can address your internal concern, interrupt the stress response cycle and stay out of fight-or-flight mode.

For example: If standing in a long line drives you crazy, an appropriate mantra might be, “I’m in no rush at the moment.” For those who blow a fuse circling for parking spaces, a mantra that might work could be, “I’ll find a spot eventually.”

The idea is to take a step back from the situation and try to look at it as objectively as you can. Is waiting in this long line inconvenient? Sure, but be realistic and practical: It will soon pass, and, in all likelihood, you’ll forget it ever happened.

Next, spend a beat thinking about the worst case scenario. What’s the actual consequence of standing in line at the bank another 10 minutes or restarting a finicky device? Do any of these outcomes constitute a life-or-death threat?

“Almost always, always, always, no is the answer,” Ms. Ryan said.

**Reframe the experience and connect it to a larger story**[Sarah A. Schnitker,](https://www.baylor.edu/psychologyneuroscience/index.php?id=950614) an associate professor of psychology and neuroscience at Baylor University and a leading researcher on the topic of patience, suggests using a powerful technique called [cognitive reappraisal](https://www.psychologyinaction.org/psychology-in-action-1/2014/02/17/psychological-skills-changing-your-emotions-an-intro-to-cognitive-reappraisal), which means thinking about a situation differently.

Take, for example, someone aggravated with a nitpicky co-worker. Instead of dwelling on your irritation, you could think about the times you’ve been the one who has frustrated others.

“Give grace to each other,” Dr. Schnitker said. Or think, “you know what, this is actually helping me to grow as a person.”

Another strategy she recommends is to focus on *why* and *how* patience is integral to your values.

“For instance,” Dr. Schnitker said, “if I were talking to a parent who is struggling with their kid, I’d say, ‘Well, first, let’s think about the really big picture: Why is being a parent an important role to you? What does that mean in your life?’”

Thinking about how patience ties into your larger sense of integrity and poise “will make it a whole lot easier to stick with practicing patience on a daily basis and building up those skills,” she added.

**Train, don’t try**The most common mistake people make is thinking sheer will can turn them into a more patient person, Dr. Schnitker said. If you do that, she cautions, you’re setting yourself up to fail.

Just as marathon runners don’t run a marathon on their first day of hitting the trails, people who are serious about cultivating patience shouldn’t expect immediate results.

“You want to train, not try, for patience,” she said. “It’s important to do it habitually.”

She suggests practicing patience during less intense, even silly situations when the stakes aren’t so high. Reappraise a situation next time you notice you’re feeling short-tempered, practice mindfulness meditation or say your own custom mantra.

“It’s like any other skill,” Dr. Schnitker said. “If you do it on a daily basis and then also connect it to that bigger picture story of why it’s important, it can grow and develop just like a muscle.”

**Consider making lifestyle changes**Now that you know your triggers and are working on staying out of fight-or-flight mode, incorporate some stress reduction measures. If your impatience trigger is killing time in waiting rooms, designate a game on your phone that you play only when you’re at the doctor’s office. If you detest being in traffic, leave for appointments earlier. If you abhor crowded grocery stores, run your errands at off-hours.

Ms. Ryan also recommends cutting down on caffeine intake, as that can exacerbate stress in some people. Engaging in meditation or yoga can also help, because “then your system gets a chance to turn down the stress response and therefore you’re less likely to be triggered by everything.”

**Be realistic**Finally, [Nedra Glover Tawwab](http://kaleidoscopecounselingpllc.com/nedra-tawwab-counseling/), a licensed clinical social worker based in Charlotte, N.C., recommends being more sensible about setting achievable aims.

“Sometimes we overbook ourselves or we don’t allot enough time to do things,” she said. “Be reasonable in setting your own goals for yourself because there’s only so many things that you can do in a time frame or any day.”

If your to-do list has 10 items on it but you can only reasonably accomplish five, then you’re sabotaging yourself. Any inconvenience has the potential to throw you off-track when your day is planned down to the minute.

**“**I can’t fast forward time and I can’t make people move faster,” she said. “I can’t manipulate those things; the only thing I can manipulate is me.”