

Can Meditation Keep Your Brain Young?

As people age, their brains lose weight and volume. These changes may start to occur in people as young as their mid-20s. Astoundingly, research has shown that people who meditate to lose less brain mass over time than those who do not. In particular, research concluded people who meditated showed less of a decrease in their white brain matter.

White brain matter acts as a connector and insulator for gray brain matter. It carries nerve impulses between the functional parts of the brain. Gray brain matter houses the various neurological centers of the brain, which direct speech, motor skills, memory, and more.

It is estimated that meditation is practiced by more than 15 million Americans and many more people around the world. It has its roots in eastern culture, but has been whole-heartedly embraced in western societies.

Meditation has a wide variety of benefits, including:

- Improves sleep
- Inner peace and tranquility
- Reduces chronic pain
- Reduces stress and anxiety
- Reduces depression
- Boosts attention
- Improves immunity
- Helps with weight loss
- Boosts memory
- Improves heart health and lowers blood pressure
- Improves wellbeing and allows for deeper relationships

Now researchers are finding that meditation may also help to keep our brains young!

Interesting Experiments

A team of researchers from UCLA wondered if meditation preserves the gray matter of people who meditate as well. The researchers found meditation to have a widespread effect on the entire brain not just specific regions of the brain associated with meditation. The study compared people having years of meditation experience with those who had none.

The meditators had an average of 20 years of experience with meditation practice. The age range of the of the study participants included people in their mid-20s to their late 70s. Nearly equal numbers of men and women participated in the study with 28 men and 22 women. They found the meditators still experienced a decline in gray matter with age but less than non-meditators. The researchers noted the positive outcome of the study but caution people reviewing the results: they were unable to establish a direct link to meditation and the preservation of gray matter.

Another UCLA study conducted in 2012 showed meditators to have more gyrification, folds in their brains, which may contribute to an ability process information faster than usual. Meditation appears to allow practitioners to maintain both white and gray matter and form increased connections in the brain; it seems to keep the brain young. Along with its positive effects on white and gray brain matter, meditation appears to have a positive effect on other body functions.

Anti-Aging Benefits Of Meditation

The youth-preserving and renewing benefits of meditation include:

- Meditation increases DHEA, which facilitates the production of the hormones that maintain fat and mineral metabolism.
- An increase in Melatonin, which acts as antioxidant,

supplies immune support and fights depression.

- A decrease in cortisol, the stress hormone that encourages the body to retain dangerous belly fat associated with heart disease and diabetes.

The Effects Of Meditation

Part of feeling and maintaining a youthful mental outlook centers around the quality of one's thinking patterns. Meditators learn to quiet mental chaos and build their ability to concentrate. They experience greater clarity of thought and tend to react less and respond more to circumstances. In short, they maintain their ability to be highly adaptive and think quickly with the additional benefit of choosing their response to situations rather than reacting to them.

How To Meditate

Meditators in the studies above, typically meditated twice a day for 20 minutes per sitting. Some schools of thought recommend meditation to start the day and to close it. However, a person may meditate whenever they have time in their schedule to accommodate it. And not everyone is ready to sit for a 20 minute stretch. Meditation is not an all or nothing proposition. It is also beneficial to meditate in shorter increments of time, sitting for 5 or 10 minutes. Consistency is the key here, not so much the length of time.

There are also several different methods of meditation, including:

- Primordial Sound Meditation
- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction
- Zen
- Transcendental Meditation
- Yoga Meditation (Kundalini)
- Focused Attention Meditation
- Open Monitoring Meditation
- Vipassana Meditation
- Loving Kindness Meditation (Metta Meditation)

- Mantra Meditation (OM Meditation)
- Qigong (Chi kung)

Getting Started

A person new to meditation needs to be patient; it takes time to train the mind to focus and settle into a meditation practice. The first step is to decide which form of meditation you wish to practice, and then learn how to do it. If you'd like a little guidance on how to start, please consider joining the [Know Yourself membership](#) where you will gain support and many resources to support your journey of self-discovery!

The benefits of a consistent meditation practice can develop in a few weeks with continued practice preserving your brain's youthful dynamics for years to come.