

The Health Advantages of and Medical Conditions Helped by Meditation

You may have heard about the health benefits of yoga in improving mental and physical health and improving flexibility, and you might assume that meditation is the same thing. Although meditation can certainly be incorporated into yoga, on its own, it is an entirely different practice.

How Meditation Works

Meditation involves *stopping your mind* while maintaining a state of awareness. It is much more than sitting and concentrating in a quiet area for a designated amount of time; it involves clearing your mind of thoughts, achieving a deep inward peace, and maintaining alertness in the process.

People often use certain postures, breathing techniques, and even chants to help facilitate the process, but these are not required, and they are not the act of meditation itself, just support tools.

As a beginner, you might consider taking a meditation class (or a yoga class that heavily emphasizes meditation) or invest in a video that introduces you to the concept of meditation and teaches you various techniques for facilitating the process. It does not come as easily for some as it does for others. Achieving a profound, deep sense of self, a “thoughtless alertness,” requires some guidance at first.

Specific Ways That Meditation Improves Health

Not only is meditation one of the very best ways to reduce stress, which is linked to a whole host of health issues and according to the Benson-Henry Institute, 60 to 90% of doctor

visits are for conditions that are caused by stress, but Harvard University researchers conducted a study that connects deep relaxation to genetic changes in the body.

They found that “disease fighting genes” are more active in people who regularly practice meditation, compared with people in the control group.

These genes protect the body against a number of health issues, including:

- Heart Disease
- Asthma
- Infertility
- Arthritis
- Various skin conditions
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome
- Meditation even helps to boost immunity, and studies show that cancer patients have recovered more effectively due to meditation and are less at risk for developing another tumor.
- The benefits of stress reduction cannot be overstated.

Meditation makes the body less responsive to stress hormones, which lowers blood pressure, improves blood circulation, improves digestion and immunity, and establishes emotional and neurological “balance.”

How does this work exactly?

It largely comes down to hormones. Stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenalin increase blood pressure and heart rate, while “feel good” chemicals such as serotonin, which are released in a state of relaxation, work to repair cells.

More Health Boosting Benefits Of Meditation

- According to the Benson-Henry Institute, chronic pain patients reduce their physician visits by 36% when they

practice regular meditation.

- Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes, a journal of the American Heart Association, reported in their 2012 issue that a 5 year study on patients who had coronary heart disease found a 48% reduction in deaths, heart attacks, and strokes in those subjects who regularly practiced Transcendental Meditation versus those who did not.
- An analysis of a controlled trial, published in the Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine on October 2013 reported significantly greater effect of Transcendental Meditation in reducing anxiety over conventional medical treatments and other forms of meditation and relaxation practices.
- According to Behavioral Medicine, Volume 16, a 50% reduction in visits to HMO doctors was found when a relaxation-response based practice, like meditation is used.

How To Incorporate Meditation Into Your Life

Here are ideas for incorporating meditation into your own life. Beginners could focus on numbers 1 and 2, and over time experiment with the other ideas.

- 1. Participate In A Group Class.** You may be able to find a class in your community specifically dedicated to meditation, but due to popular culture, it may be easier to find a yoga class that heavily focuses on meditation, such as Kundalini Yoga or Ananda Yoga. Many people prefer taking these classes long-term as opposed to meditating by themselves because the group setting helps them to better focus or because they enjoy the sense of community.
- 2. Use A Video or Audio To Guide Your Meditation.** Some meditation videos can be found for free online, such as through YouTube, or you can order a professional DVD or online subscription. If you prefer a mix of yoga and meditation, the best types of yoga to focus on include

Kundalini, Ananda, Jivamukti, and Integral. Be sure to check out the free guided meditation file – available at the right of this page.

3. **Devote 20+ Minutes In The Morning Or Evening.** Research shows that just 20 minutes of consistent meditation sessions can have tremendous health benefits. Make time before your day starts or before you go to bed to meditate. Some people find that their minds are clearer at these times.
4. **Use Free Time To Meditate In Nature.** Many people find that sitting in nature – under a tree, on top of a mountain, or in a quiet place in the sunshine – helps them to facilitate the meditation process. It's also a great way to get outside for Vitamin D.
5. **Meditate While At Work.** This is certainly the most difficult way to meditate because distractions at work can interrupt the process, but many people have been able to achieve a state of meditation *while* performing job duties. Talk about being dedicated to the cause!

Everyone is different. Experiment with different ways of meditating too see what you like and what comes easiest for you. Also try experimenting at different times of the day and for different periods of time, but aim for at least 20 minutes to reap the most benefit. The health effects on your body are well worth the effort!