

10 Things About Meditation You Need To Know Today

If you're thinking about getting started with meditation, there are some things that you need to know before jumping into it. Although meditation can certainly change your life for the better, it will only do so if you go into it fully prepared and with as much knowledge about meditation as possible. So, here are 10 things about meditation you need to know today.

1. There Are Different Types Of Meditation

There are many types of meditation, and every one of them is a little different. There are three primary types of meditation: open monitoring, focused attention, and automatic self-transcending. Within these, there are many other types of meditation that you can do, including heart rhythm meditation, guided visualization, and Qi Gong.

Each type of meditation is different and has various purposes and benefits. That's why it's important to take some time to determine exactly what you want to get out of meditation before you jump into it. You need to make sure that the type of meditation you choose fits your lifestyle and beliefs, and is something that will benefit you. There are some types of meditation that target specific problems such as anxiety, heart disease, or stress.

2. You Don't Have To Stick With One Type Of Meditation

You're by no means stuck with the first type of meditation that you choose. In fact, even if you've taken the time to

decide which one is right for you, it still may not end up working for you. The good news is that you can keep looking for another type of meditation to try until you do find something that works for you. You can also learn several types of meditation to gain the different benefits and use them for different situations.

We recommend taking time to learn one type well before moving onto another type of meditation. Because each type requires time to learn and practice, it's better to keep your focus on one type until you've mastered it before you decide to learn another one. However, once you have mastered several types, you'll be ready to use them when you need them.

3. It Doesn't Require A Certain Posture Or Position

When most people think of meditation, the first thing that comes to mind is a cross-legged guru with their hands resting on their thighs, fingers and thumbs forming circles while they hum. However, there really aren't any specific rules about how to meditate, and you certainly don't have to sit rigidly the whole time.

Actually, meditation requires you to be as comfortable as possible so you can keep focused on what's going on in your mind instead of your body. Sitting upright is generally the best position so you don't fall asleep while meditating, but there are some types of meditation that require you to be laying down, like body scan meditations and meditation for sleep.

4. It Won't Make Your Mind Go Blank

Something that many people incorrectly believe about

meditation is that it involves emptying your mind of all your thoughts and reach a state where you think of absolutely nothing for a period of time, and it's that blank slate that allows you to accomplish a greater level of enlightenment and self-awareness. However, this is simply not true, nor is it possible.

The mind naturally jumps from thought to thought, and trying to stop it from doing that will only leave you frustrated and very much not relaxed. What meditation actually does is gives you tools to keep your focus on only your meditation. Being aware of the thoughts that come up during meditation is an important part of it and is what will help you come to a deeper understanding of your own mind.

5. You can learn from a variety of sources

Some people believe that there's only one way to learn how to meditate, but there are actually several different ways. This is great news because everybody has a different learning style, so not everybody is going to be able to learn meditation the same way, just like learning anything. Fortunately, for as many learning styles as there are, there are tools and techniques to learn how to meditate.

You may find that reading a book is the best way to learn meditation. Others may instead listen to that same book on audio to learn. You can also get help from someone who has already mastered the type of meditation you want to learn. This can be the best way because they can help guide you and work through any specific problems that you have. What's important is that you find what works best for you.

6. You Might Fall Asleep During Meditation.

Even if you're not doing meditation specifically to fall asleep, you may find yourself falling asleep while meditating because it puts you into such a relaxed state, especially if you're doing it at the end of a long day at work. The good news is that this is totally normal and if you do, don't worry too much about it. If it does seem to be turning into a problem, then you can try a few techniques to keep yourself alert during meditation.

7. Meditation Physically Changes Your Brain

Although meditators have known that there are profound changes that happen in your mind when you meditate, only recently have researchers taken the time to study the physical changes that take place in your brain because of meditation. Some studies that have been done looked at the differences between meditators and non-meditators, while others looked at the changes that occurred in a group of people who started meditating.

One of the changes seen in the brain of those who meditate regularly is that there's more gray matter which means more brain cells. Another change involved the amygdala which is where the "fight or flight" reflex is triggered. In those that meditate regularly, this area was physically smaller which means they're more likely to handle stressful situations without reacting with fear.

Another interesting thing to note when it comes to physical changes that happen when you meditate are the brain scans done of people who have been meditating for many, many years. Their scans when they were not meditating looked like an inexperienced meditating while in a state of meditation, meaning that the changes that occur during meditation eventually become permanent.

8. There Are Many Health Benefits To Meditating

The health benefits that occur in the brain from meditating are only the beginning of the many things that meditation can do for your body. Meditation has also shown that it can increase blood circulation which helps lower your blood pressure and your risk of developing heart disease, which is the leading cause of death for people in the United States.

One of the reasons that meditation has such an impact on your health is that as you become more aware of your inner self, you become more protective of it and begin to make healthier choices for your body. Many people have successfully used meditation to quit smoking or get out of other addictions because meditation allows them to deal with the underlying reasons for their addition.

9. It Doesn't Have To Take A Lot Of Time Out Of Your Day

This may be one of the most common misconceptions with meditation is that it takes up a significant part of the day. This belief has led many people to not even bother to meditate since they don't feel like they'll have the time to do it. Although there are certainly some types of meditation that expect people to devote an hour in the morning and an hour at night, there are many more that require significantly shorter amounts of time, as little as 5 minutes, that are easy to fit into your day.

For people that truly understand how important meditating is, they will make it a priority and make sure that they devote the time they need to meditate every day. As you start meditating regularly and see the benefits of it, then you, too, will be willing to get up a little earlier or put your

phone down for a few minutes to meditate.

10. It Takes Time To Master

Like learning any new skill, meditation takes time to master. You won't get it right the first few times, and that's ok. Just like you don't be able to run a 6-minute mile the first time you step onto a running track, you need to practice to master meditation. It will also take time for you to begin to see the benefits of meditation, so don't give up if you don't immediately start sleeping better at night or feeling less stressed throughout the day.

This is why self-evaluation is such an important part of meditation. You need to take a step back every once and a while to really evaluate how you are so you can see that the meditation really is working. One way to do this is by keeping a journal where you can note your thoughts and feelings. Over time, you'll see how meditation is changing you and the way you see the world.

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!

Science Shows Meditation Slows Aging in the Brain

As the life expectancy continues to rise as it has for the last century, the percentage of the population that we are seeing with problems that we associate with an aging brain such as dementia or Alzheimer's continues to grow. By 2050, the percentage of the population that is age 60 and older is expected to triple, and, as a result, there is an expectation that dementia and other neurodegenerative diseases will also increase (World Health Organization).

Finding the path to slowing the cognitive effects of aging on the brain will be critical to the sustainment and quality of life for our aging population.

Science and Meditation

Science shows that meditation can decrease the rate at which our brain is aging. Age triggers a natural aging process of our mind. The cortex of our brain coats the surface of the cerebrum and cerebellum. Think of the cortex is commonly referred to as “gray matter” and it has the responsibility of processing information. The gray matter in our brain shrinks over time and leads to memory loss, verbal changes, and a decrease in the ability to process some forms of information.

Recent research shows that there is a correlation between age and brain gray matter in those who consistently practice meditation long-term. In fact, meditation can help us to preserve cognition, maintain the health of our brain tissue while also reducing the risk for conditions like dementia or Alzheimers.

Meditation and the Aging Brain

Meditation is useful in helping you to manage depression, stress, anxiety or pain. Studies show that mindful meditation is particularly helpful in supporting brain health through telomere elongation, hemodynamics, and cerebral blood flow.

In one study, 33 individuals who regularly practice meditation were asked to participate in a study looking to examine the effects of regular meditation habits on the brain. The study demonstrated that individuals who regularly engaged in the continued practice of mindful meditation experienced multiple benefits including increased sensory perception and sensitivity, and emotional awareness (Laneri, Schuster, Dietsche, Jansen, Ott, and Sommer, [Effects of Long-Term Mindfulness Meditation on Brain's White Matter Microstructure and its Aging](#)).

Another study analyzed the link between age and cortical thickness. That study demonstrates that meditators have a

thicker cortical layer than those who do not indulge in meditation, and was even similar to that of a 20-to-30-year-old (by Lazar et al. Meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness).

A third study evaluated the link between age and total gray matter volume as well as local gray matter volume. Those individuals who did not participate in meditation experienced a loss of gray matter over a period, while those who did engage in meditation had a gain of total gray matter (by Pagnoni, Age effects on gray matter volume and attentional performance in Zen meditation. Neurobiol. Aging).

This research demonstrates that meditation ignites a biological response in brain aging and neurodegeneration. It may slow, stall, or even reverse age-related brain degeneration. (by Luders et al., Forever younger: potential age-defying effects of long-term meditation on gray matter atrophy).

In Summary

We are all growing older each day. Although we cannot stop it from happening, we may be able to take action based on the scientific evidence to slow its impact on our brain. There is still a great deal of research to be done to examine further the positive effects that meditation may have on the health of minds. It is a cost-effective approach that has the opportunity for integration into our everyday health routines.

Meanwhile, you can take the first step to add routine meditation practice into your daily regimen to begin reaping the benefits of reducing age-related brain deficits.



If you find yourself struggling to find peace and

understanding in your daily life, it might be time to adapt a meditation practice. This short ebook covers aspects of meditation and self-discovery, introduces the “Rainbow Meditation Technique” and reviews the benefits of meditation.

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