

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!

Basic Overview of the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali are a compilation of 196 aphorisms. It is a comprehensive fundamental text of yoga, and

an instrumental part of Hindu scriptures said to be compiled by the sage, Patanjali. Its influence on yoga philosophy cannot be over-emphasized.

Although Patanjali's exact roots and time of existence is quite unsure, and there are varying myths about his birth, he is ascribed to have been from the medieval era, and contributed immensely to the growth and prominence of yoga sutras. The yoga sutras of Patanjali are said to have been compiled from about 250 BCE to 250 CE. It is further widely acclaimed that although Patanjali compiled the yoga sutras, he however did not create them. Archaeological sources reveal that the yoga sutras are no new practices, but ancient traditional exercises that have been in existence and in practice as far back as 3000 BCE.

Yoga is Sanskrit, translated to mean 'yoke'. *Sutra* on the other hand, also Sanskrit, is translated as 'thread'. The yoga sutras are a means to gain self-realization through deep reflection, and synergy of the mind, body and soul.

According to Patanjali, "yoga is the progressive settling of the mind into silence. When the mind is settled, we are established in our own essential state, which is unbounded consciousness. Our essential nature is usually overshadowed by the activity of the mind."

Patanjali's yoga sutra is a book that teaches how practical and deliberate yoga can lead to attainment of Moksha, following the discipline associated with practicing yoga. It is compiled in such a way that the essence of yoga, the progress and spiritual growth associated with it is succinctly embedded. In the sutras, Patanjali takes into consideration the gratification as well as the challenges that one is bound to encounter in the process of its practice, and establishes ways in which they can be triumphed.

Patanjali's compilation does not try to modify or change the

traditionally practiced yoga sutras, it however makes the process and methods easily accessible, and understandable. With the practical and instructive teachings, Patanjali's yoga sutras makes it easy for yogis, both old and new to be able to direct their focus and energy to a single source or stream. The yoga sutras are highly similar to the Samkhya school of thoughts, except the former acknowledges the Divine and ultimate reality which is God, while the latter does not acknowledge God, because it lacks evidence to back its existence.

While the book is an important part of the Hindu scriptures, the yoga sutras are not limited to just Hindus. They are for all, and can be practiced by absolutely everyone; everyone who seeks to gain spiritual growth, understanding, peace and tranquility, an evenness between mind and body. The sutras encourages people to look deep within themselves, and find who they truly are, and what their purpose truly is, in the quiet and stillness of their thoughts. The calm that transcends the distractions of our mental activities and outside stimuli.

It is a dominant stimulant of positive energy, and promotes oneness and harmony between individuals and nature. This is perhaps the reason why people springing from varying denominations, whose beliefs and practices differ a great deal, are seen indicating very apt and keen interest in the yoga sutras, and even go farther to incorporate them into their daily, weekly, or even monthly routines. The basic and inherent truth is that the practice of yoga has spanned way longer before its compilation by Patanjali, not just by Hindus, and the tradition has continued. The difference is that they are now more elaborately and succinctly summarized in the 194 sutras, and easily accessible and understandable, hence, gathering a broader audience willing to engage to gain inner peace and control over their mind.

The yoga sutras are divided in four chapters or books.

- **SAMADHI PADA:** It is the first book, consisting of 51 sutras. Its teachings are on the general nature of yoga and its techniques. It explains a stage where those who practice yoga experience an out of body encounter via meditation.
 - **SADHANA PADA:** It is the second book, and consists of 55 sutras. It expatiates on the mastery of discipline. It is of two forms: the preliminary, which is kriya yoga, and the first five of the eight limbs of yoga known as bahiranga or external.
 - **VIBHUTI PADA:** It consists of 56 sutras, and is the third book. It is based on the last three limbs of the eightfold system, and is referred to as the antaranga or internal. It also explains supernatural exhibitions and influences that are orchestrated through the practice of yoga, both in positive and negative aspects.
 - **KAIVALYA PADA:** A compilation of 34 yoga sutras. It is the fourth and last book. It is focused on describing liberation from the death and rebirth cycle, the Moksha. It deals with a deeper knowledge of self and detachment.
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Hinduism Goal of Moksha

One belief in Hinduism is that of reincarnation. The belief that one would die and be reborn as many times as need be until they obtain Moksha, the ultimate goal of all Hindus. This cycle of death and rebirth is known as the Samara. A person's quality of life typically determines what caste they would belong after rebirth. The higher the caste, the more the blessings.

The Samsara is said to have begun with religious movements at about the first millennium BCE. These movements include

Hinduism, which believes that life is a complicated and repeated process of death and rebirth. They think it as bondage, and Moksha, the liberation.

Basically, people build up karmic connections through their actions. It could be good or bad. It is all dependent on how one has lived. If you live a life of devotion, free of troubles, you transcend into a higher caste, which as aforementioned, depicts more blessings, if you have lived a life causing chaos and increasing pain in the society, you transcend into a lower caste.

Also known as *vimoksha*, *vimukti*, and *mukti*, moksha is the total liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth. Its attainment is the highest goal in Hinduism. A state of freedom and liberation into a higher consciousness. It is derived from the Sanskrit *muc* which *translates* to being free, liberation. Moksha is the fourth goal of Hinduism. It is achieved only by overcoming the desires of the flesh, and all worldly sentiments, and living a life of benevolence. It is attainable both in the present lifetime and after death. To further buttress what it embodies, is to simply put that, it is a state where oneness with Brahman, the ultimate reality is attained. A state of peace and blessedness. This stage is known as the *paripurna-brahmanubhava*; the experience of oneness with Brahman.

Moksha is however thought somewhat differently by the varying school of thoughts in Hinduism. While it is thought of as liberation from the samsara, i.e., the cycle of death and rebirth, it is thought by others to be the end of the sufferings that are accompanied by the cycle of death and rebirth. Moksha is also referred to as kaivalya by some.

In some schools of thought in Hinduism, when Moksha has been attained by an individual during his/her lifetime, it is referred to as *jivanmukti*, and the person who experiences this liberation, is called the *jivanmukta*, which translates to

self-realized person. Moksha after death is however, referred to as *videhamukti*.

There are no definite and stipulated ways on how everyone can achieve Moksha. The Hindu books reveal that there are many different paths, all of which lead to liberation. Liberation which has been earlier stated to mean being in a state of oneness with Brahman. A state of absolute detachment from vanity and the outside world, a state of quietness and absolute control of the thoughts, which accordingly, is referred to as the ultimate form of bondage and liberation. This is because the mind suggests multiple thoughts to us, both positive and negative all day long. All of which create noise and some form of chaos in our mental state, disrupting our ability to concentrate and remain in oneness with the Brahman. When one is incapable of quieting their minds, and harmonizing with the Supreme Being, they remain in the state of bondage. However, when they are able to overcome the desires and temptations suggested by the mind, then they can achieve Moksha. The Hindu scriptures rightly states that if one cannot wield total control of their mind, they lack the weapons necessary to achieve Moksha.

In clearer terms, the Upanishads mention that the mind is basically of two kinds. The pure and impure. It is referred to as impure when it is brimming with desires of the flesh, and pure when it gains freedom from them.

Although the paths and processes to attaining Moksha are endless, there are three paths which could be termed as a summary of what the road to achieving Moksha would seem like. They are;

- The karma yoga, also known as the path of action.
- Bhakti yoga, which is the path of devotion.
- Jnana yoga, or the path of knowledge.

As countlessly stated, Moksha comes when one achieves oneness

with God. However, there are different basic schools of thought regarding the nature of what oneness with Brahman indicates in Hinduism. One of these thoughts, and perhaps, most prominent is the *Advaita Vedanta*, otherwise known as non-dualism. It is the belief that a person's spirituality is tied to the ultimate reality, Brahman. Its doctrine is that total submission to Brahman is the way to achieve Moksha.

Speak, Think, and Act Truthfully

There are a couple "hiding spots" where police cars sit in my town, presumably taking radar. I'm one of these people who follows the speed limit signs, and I dare say this lesson is ingrained in me because I know police are lurking around any corner.

Do I drive the speed limit? Yes, of course I want to follow rules for the sake of keeping my city safe. But I also know police have certain "hiding" spots. Other drivers are in a perpetual hurry and/or could care less about the rules of the road. Do they worry about getting caught?

The other day it occurred to me that the only reason police cars are in their hidden spots is to keep people honest. Seriously, that's really how we're motivated. We are good when people are watching, but not always so when the cameras are off and judgmental eyes are closed. It is as if we need each other to keep ourselves in check.

One of the virtues of Indian religions is *Satya*, the Sanskrit word for truth. One should be truthful in thought, speech, and action. *Satya* is one of the five *yamas* in Yoga. It asks

practitioners to restrain from saying or even thinking falsehoods and to not distort reality.

Satya teaches us to be true not only to ourselves, but to each other. Being truthful means that we must know and accept ourselves and our intentions. This interesting article in [Psychology Today](#) explains that, as a society, we are 20% dishonest. We lie to each to make ourselves look better, or smarter, to avoid accusations, and just to keep the peace. Sincerity is not always easy when we are concerned with how others perceive us.

If you can be true to who you are, and consider the effect of what you say has on others, you will probably be more honest in general.

Being true to yourself is even more important than being truthful with others. If you can't look at yourself and be honest about your mistakes and inadequacies, then how can you be honest with others? When you can learn from your mistakes in a non-judgmental way, you can help move the world forward.

When you know someone has lied to you, you have a hard time trusting them again. And what's worse? That distrust reflects onto completely different people. How can I possibly trust Sally when Mary spouts lies daily? It is sad, but true. And the more the cycle is perpetuated, the longer it takes for us to be truly truthful.

Honesty can give you an almost unimaginable lightness. Truth means you don't have to hide behind anything. You can live guilt-free, knowing that you are an open book. Chances are if you radiate with honest intention, you will end up surrounding yourself with other truthful beings.

Celebrate your Satya with some truthful jewelry:
<https://www.satyajewelry.com/>

3 Yoga Asanas for Stronger Wrists

Some of us have weak wrists. Some of us suffer from carpal tunnel. Yoga can help.

First let me tell you a secret about developing stronger wrists with Yoga. There are several poses that you can use, which I'll explain soon. But first, if you haven't read my post [3 Yoga Poses to Make You Sturdy](#), let me tell you something. The tip that doesn't get talked about enough is: keep intention in your fingers. Your fingers help your wrists bear the impact of supporting the weight of your body. When preparing for wrist poses, spread out each lovely extension as wide as you can, and, like your toes in Tadasana, lift the tips of your fingers and allow the power to radiate from your fingers. If you put intention into sharing the responsibility of the weight, you will lighten your load.

Plank Pose

This is probably the most universal way to gain strength in your wrists. You can do from standard straight legs and back on toe tips and flat hands, or with knees to floor. Variations include side plank and Upward Plank Pose. Hold your version for at least 30 seconds. As you develop wrist and core strength, extend that period to longer times. Work a few minutes of Plank Pose into your day. Even when you are not exercising.

Crow Pose

I don't know about you, but I love this pose. It simultaneously reminds me of the fun I had playing in the yard when I was 7 years old and of how strong it makes me feel right now. I feel empowered knowing I can keep my body quiet

in an awkward position. It gives me strength to keep my gaze on that spot just above my head on the floor as I count as many breaths as possible before coming back down, with as much control as possible. Start in a squat and place your wrists directly below your shoulders. Relax into the pose by putting your knees in your armpits, just to do a slight stretch. Then place your knee caps on the back of your triceps as you lean forward slightly. Slowly lift your toes off the floor. If this pose is new to you, you can work to just keep your toes 2-3 inches off the floor. As you gain more strength, your toes can come together a foot off the floor as you maintain a calm, steady breath as you hold yourself in balance on your wrists for an increasing number of breaths.

Handstand

This pose is, of course, not for the faint of heart, but wow, can it make you feel good! Most Yoga teachers don't want you to do a handstand until you are at least into an intermediate level, because it takes an extraordinary control to keep your body in balance during handstand. Normally you are not using the wall, but simply pushing your legs overhead in the middle of the room. But let's start small. Near a wall, start on all fours – hands flat on the floor and toes tucked under with knees on the ground. Then push your knees up and back, as if in downward dog. When you are ready, flip one leg upward, with the other joining the first directly after. Your fingertips should be about 12 inches away from the wall. Once your heels are on the wall, keep your feet parallel to the floor and toes pointed. Keep the intention and the strength in your legs while maintaining a focus on the strength your fingers are providing to the pose. Once you have breathed 10 deep breaths, slowly, with control, bring your feet (legs straight) down to the floor. As you gain strength, keep in the inverted position for an increasing number of breaths. Generally Handstand is done towards the end of a yoga sequence, so if you are working on Handstand alone, you might want to take a few moments in child's pose at the end to restore your body before you come to stand again.

If you perform these three poses with some regularity, in just

a few weeks you will note that your wrists are stronger. And most hopefully the pains you occasionally feel at night or even during the day in your forearms will melt away before long.