

Wellbeing Essentials

Meditation

“Meditation appears to control blood pressure and the signals that trigger fight or flight.”

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Meditation



Historically, meditation has been linked to religion and also to specific poses (like sitting with your legs crossed and chanting). It is true that these are both examples of different types of meditation.

HOWEVER!!!! These images, unfortunately just get in the way of our understanding of what meditation actually is and how it can benefit our mental (and physical) wellbeing.

Meditation is actually the process of training your mind to focus and redirect your thoughts and you can use it in all sorts of useful ways including: increasing awareness of yourself, reducing stress and developing concentration.

And it doesn't end there!

Meditation can also be used to develop good habits and feelings, positive mood, positive outlook, self-discipline, good sleep patterns and even an increased tolerance to pain – not bad really when all you have to do is sit or lie comfortably for a few minutes each day.

So, let's have a look at the many benefits of meditation and how simple it is to do.

• Meditation Reduces Stress

Our brain releases cortisol when we are stressed. Increased levels of cortisol can disrupt sleep, increase blood pressure, cloud our thinking, lead to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety and it can make us feel less energetic.

Studies show that regular meditation carried out over eight weeks reduces the effects caused by cortisol and can also reduce symptoms in people who have medical conditions triggered by stressful situations.

• Meditation Controls Anxiety

As stress levels reduce so do anxiety levels. Meditation also reduces symptoms of more serious anxiety disorders including phobias, paranoia, OCD and panic attacks.

Longer term studies have shown that people who continue meditating after the first eight weeks maintain lower anxiety levels.

Each new day is an opportunity to appreciate and enjoy your life

Rachel Munns



Meditation isn't always just about sitting or lying down. Techniques like Yoga and Tai Chi can be a form of meditation and have also been shown to reduce anxiety.

• Meditation Promotes Emotional Health

Some forms of meditation can lead to improved self-image. A positive self-image is critical in building our resilience. Meditation also gives us a more positive outlook on life. Long term meditation practise has been proven to reduce depression too!

• Meditation Enhances Self-Awareness

Meditation can help you to develop a stronger understanding of yourself, and so help you to be your best self.

For example, self-inquiry meditation specifically aims to help you understand yourself better and how you relate to others around you.

Other styles teach you to recognise thoughts that might be harmful to you. As you become more familiar with your thought habits you can begin to steer them in a more positive direction.

Meditation also helps us to become more creative at problem solving.

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• Meditation Increases Attention Span

Focused-attention (like concentrating on your breathing) meditation is a bit like weight-lifting for your attention span!

It helps to increase the strength and endurance of your concentration.

It has also been shown to improve memory and it reverses brain patterns that contribute to mind-wandering and worrying.

One study found that meditating for just four days in a row was enough to increase attention span!

• Meditation May Reduce Age-Related Memory Loss

Through improving your attention abilities and your clarity of thinking, you will be able to help your mind to stay young.

This is where the 'chanting' styles of meditation come in useful. They combine a mantra (or a chant) with repetitive finger movements to focus thoughts which leads to improved performance in memory tasks among older people.

Meditation has also been shown to partially improve memory in patients with dementia.

• Meditation Can Generate Kindness

Metta meditation is a Buddhist based meditation for cultivating compassion and forgiveness. It begins with developing kind thoughts and feeling towards yourself. With practise, you can then extend these thoughts to the people around you - beginning with friends and family but, eventually, even extending to enemies.

With Metta meditation you are rewarded exponentially for your efforts – the more time you put into it, the better the results you attain.

Other benefits of Metta meditation include reducing social anxiety, reducing relationship conflicts and helping with anger management.

• Meditation May Help Fight Addictions

Because regular meditation helps you to develop mental discipline, you can then use this to increase

your self-control and your awareness of the triggers that lead to addictive behaviours.

Research has shown that meditation can help to increase will-power, control emotions and increase our understanding of the main causes behind addictive behaviours.

Meditation can also help you to lose weight and eliminate other unwanted habits.

• Meditation Improves Sleep

Sleep is as important to the health of our brain as oxygen is to the health of our body.

And yet, almost half of the population will struggle with insomnia at some point.

One study that compared a group of people who meditated and another group who didn't showed that the meditators fell asleep faster and stayed asleep for longer.

Being skilled in meditation helps you to control your thoughts and avoid the 'mind-racing' that is often linked to insomnia.

• Meditation Helps Control Pain

When we are stressed we feel pain more acutely as we are more aware of it.

Using MRI scans it has been proven that the parts of our brain that control pain become stronger with as little as four days of meditation. This results in reduced sensitivity to pain.

Some studies even show that meditation can help to reduce chronic pain in people with terminal illnesses.

• Meditation Can Reduce Blood Pressure

The body's natural response to stress is known as our 'fight or flight response'. This response triggers a chemical reaction in the body and, as part of the process, our blood pressure rises. Over time this can lead to heart problems and strokes.

Studies show that meditation appears to control blood pressure and the signals that trigger fight or flight.

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Not only does blood pressure reduce during actual meditation sessions, it reduces overall in people who practise regularly.

• Meditation – The Bottom Line

Meditation is something that anyone can do to improve their mental and emotional health.

Most forms of meditation don't need special equipment or space, and you can do it for just a few minutes each and every day, so it doesn't take up a lot of time either.

There are loads of fantastic apps available (most of them for free) where you can try different styles depending on what you want to achieve.

I would recommend 'Headspace' as a good introduction. The first ten sessions are free, and you'll get a good idea of what's involved.

You can choose to use meditation to clear your mind and relax or to become more self-aware – to get to know yourself better and to become calmer and more confident.

Rachel Munns Founder & Principal



Resilient Me specialise in Mental Health Awareness, Resilience and Wellbeing training. We also offer confidence building, motivational and personal leadership workshops. We all have close, 'lived' experience of mental health issues, and this combined with our individual expertise has enabled us to produce training and coaching that genuinely makes a difference. **If you want to know more – just call us on 07967 276194 or email info@resilientme.co.uk**

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