

Meditation provides multiple benefits

By Amy Smith

The links between your mind and body are abundant. One significant connection is how the mind can affect your physical state of health.



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There are many healthful benefits of positive thinking, imagery and meditation. More than 1,000 clinical trials indicate meditation can help treat anxiety, chronic pain, high blood pressure, and insomnia. Studies also show meditation can improve attention and help with stress management.

Meditation and brain activity

Richard Davidson, founder of the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin, examined the brain activity of Tibetan monks who meditated daily on compassion. Through magnetic resonant imaging (MRI), he determined that these monks had increased neuron activity in the left prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain associated with happiness.

Davidson then compared non-meditating individuals who initiated a compassion meditation practice. Two weeks after starting a thirty minute daily practice, participants developed more neuron activity in the left prefrontal cortex.

Davidson concluded this neuron activity, activated by meditation, strengthens neurological circuits to the left prefrontal cortex. This reduces fear and anger triggers and boosts contentment and resilience.

Meditation types

Meditation, or the act of quieting your conscious awareness, is difficult. To quiet the mind, meditative practices each have a unique approach.

In the practice of Breath Meditation, focus on consciously observing inhalation and exhalation and the rise and fall of the chest. Or follow the sequence pattern of four-seven-eight: Inhale through your nose for the mental count of four seconds, hold your breath for the count of seven seconds, and exhale through your mouth for the count of eight seconds. A longer exhalation than your inhalation lowers your blood pressure and pulse rate.

Mindfulness Meditation is based on having an increased awareness of the present. The goal is to focus on experiencing the present without reacting to it. Through this practice of meditation, you can develop a more balanced response to the different emotions you experience daily.

Transcendental Meditation is when a person focuses on a mantra, perhaps a sound or a phrase. Repeat this mantra over and over either aloud or silently in your head. This act of repetition keeps distracting or negative thoughts from your conscious awareness. The goal of transcendental meditation is to achieve a state of relaxed awareness and improve alertness.

Another type of meditation, Visualization, focuses on a specific place or object associated with a personal sense of well-being.

Pick a meditative practice and try using nature sounds or instrumental background music to quiet the conscious from

other distractions.

Meditation applications

If you are new to meditation, download a mobile application onto your phone or tablet to help guide you through the process. Some of my favorites are “Simply Being” by Meditation Oasis, “Calm: Meditation” A Mindfulness Practice, and “Relax Melodies: Zen Melodies for Sleep.”

Meditation is just one integrative medicine approach. Learn about other examples of effective integrative medicine on April 6 at my What is Integrative Medicine? lecture.

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