

## **Meditation and Mindfulness**

**Dr Meenakshi Gupta**

Assist. Prof. in Physical Education, Guru Nanak Girls College, Yamuna Nagar

Meditation is a mind-body practice in which your attention is focused on being mindful of the present, your breath and your mind to promote awareness, cultivate wellbeing and reduce stress and anxiety. It comes in many forms and can be practiced almost anywhere, so long as you can be aware of your body and surroundings. Types of meditation vary throughout each person's practice and can include breathing-based meditation, mindfulness practices, nature-based visualization, mantra and spiritual meditation. Meditation can be practiced alone, in a group or with a coach or therapist.

There is no right or wrong way to do meditation. Any activity can be meditative if we're fully present, Meditation is to be present and know what we are doing, while we are doing it. If a meditation practice feels out of reach, ask yourself when and where you feel peace, comfort, joy, clarity, creativity or focus. For some, this might be while taking a shower, going for a walk or playing with their pet. When we think of all the outcomes of meditation that we're looking for, look for where that exists already in your life, because almost all of us have some window somewhere.

### **Health Benefits of Meditation**

Mediation can improve your quality of life. There are many psychological and physical benefits. Here are 10 science-based benefits of mediation:

#### **Stress Reduction**

Mindfulness-based interventions, such as meditation, have been shown to improve mental health, specifically in the area of stress. When faced with a difficult or stressful moment, our bodies create cortisol, the steroid hormone

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responsible for regulating stress and our natural fight-or-flight response, among many other functions. Chronic stress can cause sustained and elevated levels of cortisol, which can lead to other negative effects on your health, including cardiovascular and immune systems and gut health. Meditation, which focuses on calming the mind and regulating emotion, can help to reduce chronic stress in the body and lower the risk of its side effects.

### **Anxiety Management**

Mediation can help counter the effects of anxiety often noted as overwhelming feelings of fear, worry and tension by slowing down racing thoughts and regulating breathing, which calms the nervous system. Physical symptoms of anxiety can include sweating, dizziness or a rapid heart rate, caused by over thinking past or future outcomes. People with anxiety who regularly practiced meditation over the course of three years saw positive, long-term impacts on their mental health.

### **Depression Management**

Meditation can also help reduce the symptoms of depression through mindfulness and emotional regulation. One study observing individuals on a three-month-long yoga and meditation retreat found that participants showed significant improvements in depression after the retreat, as well as enhanced stress resilience and wellbeing.

### **Lowers Blood Pressure**

Hypertension also known as high blood pressure is estimated to affect one billion people worldwide. Meditation has been noted to potentially provide promising results in decreasing high blood pressure, especially when paired with healthy lifestyle habits like a balanced diet and exercise

### **Strengthens Immune System Health**

Meditation has also been found to be an effective behavioral treatment for various conditions associated with a weakened immune system. Consistent meditation has been shown to reduce the body's stress response, resulting in less inflammation and decreased risk of conditions such as chronic pain, fatigue and heart disease.

### **Improves Memory**

While meditation is best known to help ease stress and anxiety, it can also

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improve your brain structure. When you practice meditation, your brain is able to produce more gray matter, researchers found in one study. Gray matter is crucial for healthy brain cognition, as it protects the hippocampus, the part of our brain connected to memory. It's also crucial for basic human functions, including our ability to control movement and emotions. The same study found that meditating for 30 minutes a day for eight weeks can increase how much gray matter your body produces.

### **Regulates Mood**

When practiced over time, meditation has the ability to change how you emotionally react to situations. Elements of meditation, which generally include mindfulness and controlled breathing, can lead to less impulsive reactions. This means instead of reacting from a heightened emotional state such as anger or panic, people who practice regular meditation may gain the ability to more successfully regulate their mood.

### **Expert Tips for Practicing Mindfulness**

#### **1. Set a Reminder to Be Present**

In our device-dependent world, it's so easy to become disconnected from both our internal or external experiences. If you're in need of a nudge to be mindful while you travel schedule a notification to pop up on your phone. When you see it, ask, 'Am I present? Am I paying attention, or am I on autopilot? Am I listening to the person I'm with, am I taking in my surroundings, am I actually tasting my food? Checking in with yourself in this way can help reset your focus on the present.

#### **2. Sense the Bottoms of Your Feet**

If you find yourself surrounded by chaos, focus your awareness away from what's happening around you by simply feeling the soles of your feet on the ground. This focus promotes interceptive awareness, or the ability to tune in and listen to own inner guidance system. It quickly deescalates the fight or flight response that can trigger a defensive or tense reaction to outside circumstances.

#### **3. Take a Deep Breath**

Breathe in for four, hold for four, breathe out for four and hold for four. This breathing practice can help restore the function of your parasympathetic

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nervous system, bringing you into a calmer state, and it delivers oxygen to your brain, which helps you think clearly and make better decisions.

### **4. Focus on Your Heart**

Heart-focused breathing can be done quickly and virtually anywhere. To do it, shift your attention to the area around your heart, using box breathing or breathing normally at a slower pace. Imagine your breath rolling up and down right behind your sternum. Repeat for a few moments, perhaps sensing the space a few feet in front of your heart, on either side of your shoulders and a few feet behind you. Stay here as long as you like or until you sense a little more ease. This open focus helps to unplug from the stress response and plug into compassion and emotional presence.

### **5. Tap Your Fingers**

If your mind is full or you're facing a tough decision, clarity can literally be right at your fingertips. Finger tapping is a great way to pause and bring yourself back to the present. Bring your pinky finger to your thumb, then your ring finger to your thumb, then your middle finger to your thumb and then your pointer finger to your thumb. Count one, two, three, four or say, 'Be here right now, this exercise can bring you out of your mind and into your body and breath where you want to be.

### **6. Reframe Your Perspective**

When you feel stress creeping up into your thoughts, than see if you can reframe using mindfulness. Recognize your thoughts and then calmly dismiss them. If an individual is irritating you, try to find compassion for them, or if you're in an absurd situation, try to find the humor in it.

### **7. Notice Your Body**

When you are Feeling stressed Tap into your tension wherever it appears in your body, May be your shoulders are scrunched up by your ears or you're clenching your jaw. Be aware and conscious of where you're expressing your stress, tension or anxiety physically and then take steps to release it. Practicing progressive muscle relaxation by tightening different areas of the body and releasing them can also help you manage general stress and anxiety during travel.

### 8. Write It Down

I also always encourage people to add gratitude to their journaling three things that they feel grateful for. They can be the simplest things like that first sip of coffee in the morning or the weather or they can be more complex things. When you practice gratitude, it's really hard to not feel good in the present moment.

#### Conclusion:

Cultivating a culture of mindfulness and happiness is a habit change. It can be incorporated into every moment of your work life, leading to satisfaction. We need to make the effort to intentionally become mindful and sustain that mindfulness for long periods of time to realize the benefits of mindfulness practice.

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