

Meditation: The Pause That Refreshes

Do you find yourself overworked, full of worry, or just plain stressed out? Then, it's time to relax. Give your mind a break and your immune system a boost. Learn to meditate.

For many people, meditation is something quite mysterious. After all, meditation is a practice most often associated with ancient spiritual traditions. But, the fact the matter is, meditation is simply a way of relaxing your mind and your body which, in turn, helps to separate you from your everyday problems and worries. It is a process that can be learned and practiced by even the busiest person in today's modern world.

There are many forms of meditation. However, experts often say that the various forms of meditation fall into two broad categories: concentrative meditation and mindfulness meditation.

In concentrative meditation, the person sits quietly and focuses attention on a physical object, a particular sound, an image, or on the most fundamental bodily process, breathing. Most people have heard of using a mantra to meditate. Here the person repeats a special word over and over. Repetition of the word provides the focus needed for meditation. No matter what the person uses, the purpose of the object of meditation is to give the mind an anchor to the here and now. As the mind becomes absorbed in its focus on the object of meditation, external distractions are reduced. The jumble of thoughts and anxiety so common to daily life disappear.

In mindfulness meditation, there is no specific object of meditation. Instead, the person sits quietly and simply witnesses or notices whatever happens to present itself mentally. It could be a thought, a mental image, a sound, or a bodily sensation. The goal of the person meditating is to observe whatever passes through the mind and let it go without reacting to it or elaborating on it. By practicing a kind of detached awareness of immediate experience, the person is encouraging the development of a calmer, clearer state of mind.

Learning to meditate is not a complex matter. However, as with any skill of value, learning to meditate does take some effort. Fortunately, there are many books and e-books on the market that can provide the beginner with simple "how to" instructions and helpful meditation exercises. Meditation also requires practice. But, the practice can be as little as ten minutes a day.

One key to successful meditation is consistency of effort. The person needs to find a time in the day to meditate regularly. The payoff for doing so may be enormous, both physically and psychologically. Modern research has shown that the regular use of meditation enhances immunity, lowers heart rate and blood pressure, reduces cholesterol, and speeds recovery. Psychologically, meditation seems to reduce anxiety and depression, while increasing creativity and feelings of happiness and joy. Given its power and simplicity, the practice of meditation should be included in any serious, holistic approach to health and wellness.

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