

Meditation 101

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5 Surprising Benefits of Meditation You Might Not Know About

The most well-known benefit of meditation is stress-relief. Different forms of meditation have been used for literally thousands of years to quickly, and sometimes instantly, relieve and remove stress and anxiety. The LiveAndDare.com website has identified 76 scientifically proven benefits of meditation. They include lowering instances of depression and reducing anxiety.

Those mental benefits may seem logically linked to a practice where you calm your mind. However, some benefits of meditation may surprise you, including the following 5 beneficial effects of meditation you just might not know about.

1 - Meditation Makes the Teen Years Livable

High school can be a very difficult time, not only for teenagers trying to get through it alive but for their parents as well. The teenage years can be difficult because the human body and mind are changing so rapidly. This can cause self-doubt, frustration, confusion and sometimes a sense that the whole world is "out to get" the teenager.

Research from the Harvard Medical School shows that relaxation practices like meditation and deep breathing improved students' abilities to cope with hormonal mood swings, and the constant drama surrounding teen years.

2 - 'Meditation' Can Be Better Than 'Medication' for Chronic Pain

The Journal of Neuroscience reports on a study that shows you can save major money on prescription drug costs, while simultaneously relieving pain more effectively, with meditation. Pills often have bothersome and

debilitating side-effects. This is not true with meditation, that proved more effective than pain medication for chronic pain relief in that study.

3 - Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) Relief

IBS can be frustrating, inconvenient, painful and embarrassing. The answer may just be to meditate on a regular basis. Research in one study shows an 8-week practice of mindfulness for stress-relief reduced IBS symptoms by an impressive 26.4%.

4 - Meditation Actually Boosts Your Immune System

Your immune system is the complex group of processes in your body that fights infection and disease. Stress and anxiety play havoc with your immune system, and this means you're more likely to become sick or ill from any cause. Meditating regularly slows the production of stress hormones like cortisol which naturally damage your immune system.

5 - Improves Fertility Rates in Women

Researchers are still not sure why this happens. However, there is an undeniably correlated presence of notably higher fertility rates in women who meditate regularly, than in those who do not.

6 Meditation Benefits That Help You Climb the Corporate Ladder Faster

Are you climbing the corporate ladder in search of job security, better pay, more responsibility or personal power? If you are running the corporate rat race and strive to advance as quickly as possible, meditation offers significant benefits. Aside from relieving stress, which as you know is constant in a competitive business environment, meditation offers the following 6 benefits that help you climb the rungs of the corporate ladder faster and more effectively than your coworkers who do not meditate.

1 - All meditation improves focus. If you can't FOCUS (Follow One Course Until Successful), you simply are not going to make it in the advanced levels of the corporate world. Meditation, especially focused attention meditation, can create a laser-targeted vision that allows you to cut through the constant clutter and distractions around you, finishing projects and assignments quickly and productively.

2 - Meditation encourages objectivity, composure, clarity, and concentration. When you can objectively appraise any business situation, your value to your company increases dramatically. A meditation practice also improves concentration, helps you develop a clarity of vision, and guarantees you practice composure when things get stressful, essential advancement and survival tools in the corporate world.

3 - Meditation increases productivity. Whether you practice Kundalini or Vipassana meditation, or any of the other dozens of varieties, you will find yourself more productive. Incorporating meditation sessions throughout your workday will increase your productivity even greater still.

4 - Your problem-solving and decision-making abilities become stronger. Countless studies show meditation improves mental functioning and memory and dramatically decreases your chances of contracting mental health problems. This means your mental ability to attack problems, solve them, and make smart decisions is enhanced with meditation.

5 - Meditation improves your social and emotional intelligence levels. Meditation trains your brain to react objectively and intelligently. This improves both your social and emotional IQs. Studies show that employees with high levels of social and emotional intelligence are more likely to be chosen for leadership positions.

6 - Meditation is a mental and physical stress-reliever. This is probably the most well-known benefit of a regular meditation practice. What is amazing is that of all the many kinds of meditation, they are all very effective for relieving stress and anxiety. No matter what form of meditation you decide to practice, you will experience less stress. This means fewer days off, not experiencing dread and anxiety on the way to work, and a better capability to compete in a stressful corporate environment than your coworkers.

7 Simple Meditation Tips for Beginners

Beginners to meditation often approach it with preconceived notions. In contrast to popular opinion, you don't have to practice a particular religion, have a specific spiritual outlook or buy any equipment or accessories to benefit from meditation. Beginners to this age-old practice have heard it is a great stress-reliever that also delivers other mental health benefits and physical rewards. Anxious to get started, would be meditation newbies generally have one big question on their mind ...

"How do I meditate?"

They often envision trying to achieve a cramped and painful lotus position while breathing stifling incense and repeating mystical chants as necessary for a meditation practice. Preconceived notions and ill-informed stereotypical misconceptions fill their mind. If you want to get started benefiting mentally and physically from meditation, the following 7 tips and practices will quickly move you from confused newbie to calm and focused meditation veteran in no time.

1 - Understand right up front that there is no "right" and no "wrong" way to meditate. Whatever works best for you is what you should be doing.

2 - Start off slow. You should aim for 2 or 3 daily meditation sessions just 3 to 5 minutes long at first. Get familiar with the process. At first, even a 3 minute meditation session can be difficult. You may feel like you have "failed", but stick with it and your performance and benefits will get better over time.

3 - If your thoughts wander, and they will, don't criticize yourself. Recognize whatever distracting input has interrupted you, and then slowly

redirect your attention back to your point of focus.

4 - Don't try to meditate right after a heavy meal. Most people don't realize how much energy their digestive system requires. Meditating after you eat can cause frustration when you don't see or feel results happen quickly enough to make you happy. You should also be hydrated properly, but not to the point that your bladder is begging for your meditation session to be over.

5 - Use meditation soundtracks ... or don't use meditation soundtracks. Some beginners say meditation MP3 files, CDs, and YouTube videos are crucial for providing the correct audio environment for meditation. Others say this music distracted them. Find out what works for you.

6 - Realize that you don't have to sit in a cross-legged, lotus position. Meditation can take place anywhere, as long as you are seated or reclined in a comfortable position, in a calm, peaceful environment.

7 - Practice mindfulness everywhere. When you drive, while you are shopping for groceries or taking a walk around your neighborhood, be mindful of your experience. Don't focus on the past or the future, and not even the next step you are taking. Becoming mindful of the "right now" time in your life throughout the day can help your dedicated meditation practice..

How Driving Meditation Makes You a Safer (and Happier) Driver

After reading that title you may be thinking, "Meditating while driving? That's crazy!" You are probably envisioning someone trying to drive a vehicle with their eyes closed, seated in the lotus position and chanting mantras, while trying to form appropriate mudras with their hands. That is the typical experience most people think of when they hear the word "meditation".

Driving meditation, also called mindful driving, is a totally different animal.

Many types of meditation simply ask you to be mindful of your present experience. This means open your mind and all of your senses to everything that is going on around you. Doesn't this sound like the perfect recipe for safe driving? How many hours a day or a week do you spend behind the wheel of your car? Instead of considering this as wasted, stressful time, why not use it as a chance to practice mindfulness?

Notice that this practice is called "mindful driving", and not road rage, judgmental driving or revenge driving. Being totally aware of everything that is going on around you while you drive is going to mean that you definitely see poor driving habits by other drivers. When you practice mindfulness, whether driving or seated comfortably in your living room, you become aware of your current experience.

However, you do not judge the experience.

You simply encounter it, allow yourself to experience it, only concerning yourself with truly being in the moment. This means that your vision sees brake lights popping up on a line of vehicles in front of you. Your ears alert you to a car horn. Your hands notice that there is a little movement

in your steering wheel, which means you may have encountered a rougher or more difficult driving terrain.

If more people would practice mindful driving, instances of traffic accidents and road rage would drop dramatically.

Mindful driving could lead to lower insurance rates. It can definitely help lower your stress level if you are heading to a job you hate and can help you de-stress after a challenging day at work. This means less stress and anxiety when you arrive home, which promotes a happier home environment.

There are a lot of reasons to practice mindfulness while you drive. Not only do you become a safer and more aware driver, but your daily commute can actually become a stress-reliever, rather than promoting stress and anxiety.

The next time you drive, be present in everything that is going on around you. Develop an awareness of your situation, without reacting judgmentally. You will find more peace and less stress in your life, and may actually enjoy driving when in the past it was an activity you dreaded.

Meditation and Kids – How Young Is Too Young?

Meditation has been linked to multiple physical and mental health advantages. Lower stress, better longevity, lower health care costs, better emotional control and improved physical performance have all been scientifically proven as benefits of meditation and mindfulness. With such significant rewards, you may be thinking about getting your child involved with a regular meditation practice.

Meditation has been proven beneficial for adults, senior citizens and the elderly. It can improve the lives of men and women, so it is logical for parents, grandparents and others who care about children to wonder, "How young is too young to introduce a child to meditation?"

If you are asking this question, you are far from alone. Browse Internet meditation forums and you see more than a few questions like the following:

"Is my 9-year-old daughter too young to learn meditation?"

"My son just turned 6. Is that too young for meditation?"

"I have heard about meditation for toddlers. How does that work?"

Meditation might not be the first thought that enters your mind when you think of energetic, active preschoolers and toddlers. Many think that because these young children do not have fully formed brains, not only are they incapable of meditating properly, but the practice is a waste of time.

Science tells us differently.

Multiple studies show "immediate behavioral changes in children" once they begin meditating. The National Therapies Research Unit at the Royal Hospital for Women in Australia performed a study on 26 children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) between 2003 and 2012. The children were between the ages of 4 and 12. A regular practice of Sahaja Yoga Meditation took place for 6 weeks. Here are just a few results of that meditation practice.

- A reduction in medication use by 50% of the child test subjects
- Better parent-child relationships
- Enhanced feelings of self-esteem and self-worth
- A reduction in hyperactivity, and a simultaneous improvement in attention
- Less impulsive activity

A Baltimore, Maryland school teaches children to meditate during detention. Yoga therapist Heather Galea has seen even the youngest children benefit from being around a parent who is performing yoga and meditating. Best-selling childcare author Pinky McKay has seen meditation calm and relax children younger than 2 years of age.

This is happening because studies show increased attention, better grades, lower levels of stress and anxiety, better self-awareness and healthy self-regulation are all benefits from meditation for children. Kaiser Greenland is the author of *The Mindful Child*, and points to years of research that shows meditation helps make children happier and more compassionate, and aids in the developing of good habits.

Teaching toddlers to meditate may be as simple as introducing a calm, relaxed environment where they spend time with a parent or loved one. In older children, more regimented and traditional meditation practices show significant benefits, even years down the road. Children are never too young to benefit from a healthy environment. This means exposure to

meditation, relaxation and mindfulness techniques can never begin too early for your child.

Meditation Benefits for Seniors

Have you ever heard someone talking about having a "senior moment"? This usually refers to someone being forgetful or acting in some other way that is linked to impaired mental functioning. The term came to be no doubt because human beings equate a weaker mind with old age.

Science backs up this belief. As we age, especially as human beings progress past the age of 50, research shows us that our mental functioning begins to decline. However, this is far from an unavoidable situation.

Seniors that meditate and practice mindfulness can experience dramatic and positive improvements in their mental abilities.

The following meditation benefits for seniors can help those over 50 reclaim much of their mental functioning, especially if senior moments are popping up more frequently.

- **Meditation stimulates the "smile and be happy" area of the brain.** Your prefrontal cortex is the "feel good" region of your brain. As you age, you naturally activate this region less frequently, which is why seniors often experience depression and higher levels of stress and anxiety than they did when they were younger. A meditation practice leads to less stress and depression, as well as a greater sense of happiness.
- **Meditation improves mood and emotional control.** A study out of Thailand supplemented a walking therapy with meditation for seniors. Those who meditated showed more positive moods regularly than those who did not. A reduction in depression and improvement in functional fitness was also noted.
- **Regular meditation improves memory.** Meditation stimulates the hippocampus, as well as the frontal brain lobe. This means better short

and long-term memory recall for seniors. The ability to store and access newly made memories is also enhanced.

- **Meditation improves senior relationships.** Because of the stress-relieving, mood-improving nature of mindfulness and other meditation practices, seniors enjoy better relationships with their caregivers, family members and others in the senior community.

A study out of UCLA shows that an 8 week meditation program "... significantly decreased rates of self-reported loneliness." Depression from a perceived state of loneliness is a significant concern for seniors, especially those over 70 and 80 years of age.

Meditation benefits for seniors and the elderly include a decreased sense of loneliness, greater longevity, better health, less mental fog, a reduction in health care costs and a slowing of the progression of Alzheimer's disease. Meditation sessions can last just 10 and 20 minutes, and several such sessions a week lead to a multitude of mental and physical advantages seniors would be wise to take advantage of.

Meditation Is an Essential Component of Physical Fitness

Meditation is an incredible stress-reliever. It helps lower the odds that you will become anxious and depressed, and even people who don't meditate are aware of the mental benefits associated with meditation. Did you know that meditation should also be considered an essential component of any physical fitness practice?

It's true, meditating regularly and practicing mindfulness contribute to a healthy, strong body as well as a capable mind. Many doctors and health care professionals believe that mental stress is at the basis of a long list of chronic physical health problems. Mental stress and anxiety promote the release of cortisol and other hormones and chemicals which can harm your immune system.

When your natural immunity is strong and healthy, you don't become sick. When your immunity drops, as it does when you experience stress too frequently, you increase the odds that you will fall prey to infection, sickness, and disease of any kind. This means your physical health is at risk when stress is a regular part of your life. As mentioned earlier, meditation is a well-known stress-reliever, therefore promoting physical health.

Meditation Makes You Want to Workout

Meditation improves all aspects of your mind. Your mental functioning, cognition and memory benefit. Think about the last time you looked at your calendar and realized you had a workout session ahead of you. If you were stressed out, frustrated, depressed or otherwise in a negative mental state, you probably felt as though your planned exercise session was something you "had to do".

You may have even skipped your workout entirely. Now think back to the last time you looked forward to your next workout. No doubt your mental

state was healthy, you felt good about yourself and your life, and you couldn't wait to get to the gym.

Meditation makes you "want to" exercise, rather than dreading your next workout session. When you are happy to be exercising, rather than wishing you could avoid it, your performance and results both receive a boost.

Meditation Strengthens Your Parasympathetic Nervous System

If you are wondering what in the heck the parasympathetic nervous system is, it is more than just a tongue-twisting phrase. This term refers to the part of your nervous system that returns your body to a relaxed, calm, stress-free state. This usually occurs after a threat of danger or normal daily stress has been encountered. Meditation activates this process, meaning that your physical body can repair and rebuild itself effectively after exercise stresses your muscles.

Meditation Is Linked to Healthy Sleep Patterns

Ask any serious athlete and they will tell you that proper rest is extremely important to a healthy body. When you feel tired and sapped of energy during the day, your workout suffers.

You may also reach for unhealthy, sugar-filled energy drinks and sodas for a boost, and this can wreck your sleep habits. Meditation clears your mind, limits distractions and strips both your body and mind of stress, which naturally leads to better sleep patterns.

You Reach Physical Goals and Achievements Quicker

Meditation is a mental supercharger. It affects your mind in so many positive ways. One of the premier effects of meditation is its ability to give you a laser-targeted focus. This improves not only your physical performance but also your mental ability to focus on a short-term or long-term fitness goal. Meditation combined with visualization is a powerful technique that high achievers in many different sports and physical activities use routinely to surpass personal bests and reach their biggest fitness goals.

Top Meditation Tools and Accessories

You need nothing more than the proper mindset for meditation. While it is possible to enjoy a healthy meditation practice in uncomfortable, noisy surroundings, a calm, relaxed, comfortable environment will lead to better results and benefits. In the same way, the following tools and accessories can help you get the most out of your meditation practice.

Meditation cushions - These stress-relieving cushions are made specifically for a meditation practice. The Mobile Meditator Inflatable, Brentwood Home Crystal Cove, and Peace Yoga Zafu cushions are great for meditation sessions as well as yoga class.

Meditation benches - A meditation bench gets you up off of the floor. It usually contains a cushioned top layer, and a very short base or legs that elevate you from 4 inches to about 8 inches above the ground.

Meditation mats - Similar to yoga mats, meditation mats are often thicker and more cushioned. A search for "meditation mats" on Google or Amazon yields a wide variety of sizes, shapes, and materials.

Incense - The many different forms of open monitoring meditation ask you to keep your focus open, rather than directed. You reach out with all of your senses to identify with your present moment in time. Incense sticks in Sandalwood and Patchouli help create a calm, peaceful, stress-free environment.

Meditation candles - Some meditation practitioners enjoy a candle lighting ceremony that prepares them mentally for a session of mindfulness or meditation. Meditation candles are available in a wide variety of colors, sizes, and aromas.

Meditation music - As with incense, the appropriate music can help create a more serene and peaceful environment. YouTube is home to countless free Zen, meditation and relaxation videos and music, and a recent search on Amazon for the term "meditation music" returned more than 149,000 results.

Airplane mode on your phone - Nothing can ruin a good meditation session like the shrill ringing of a cell phone. Don't forget to put your phone on airplane mode or turn it off before you begin meditating. Alternately, some phones offer a "Do Not Disturb" mode that keeps you free of distractions as well.

HeadSpace - The HeadSpace application markets itself as a "Gym Membership for the Mind." Subscribers are guided through daily meditation sessions, which start at just 10 minutes each. The application was developed by a sports science student who traveled to Asia to become a Buddhist monk. Some other top free and paid meditation applications include Checky, Calm, Meditation Made Simple and Buddhify.

Understanding the Two Main Types of Meditation

There are literally dozens of different kinds of meditation practices, even driving meditation, also referred to as mindful driving. Yes, meditating while driving is a real thing, and it can actually make you a better and safer driver. The point here is that almost all recognized forms of meditation fall into one of the two following major classes.

1 - Open Monitoring

2 - Focused Attention

What is Open Monitoring Meditation?

Open monitoring meditation means keeping your focus open. You don't direct it to one central thought or physical object. You allow yourself to monitor and perceive all aspects of your physical and mental experience. You do this without judging or making any type of mental investment. Anything that you perceive with your brain, your feelings, memories, and thoughts, is recognized. Open monitoring styles of meditation include Mindfulness, Vipassana, and many types of Taoist meditation.

You also tune into your physical senses. You openly monitor anything and everything that causes sensory input, including sounds, aromas, things that you see and touch. You recognize these experiences for what they are. You do not pre-act or react, and simply act as a monitoring station, experiencing every aspect of your present moment without judging or influencing it.

Understanding Focused Attention Meditation

Focused attention meditation is clearly defined by its name. Instead of allowing yourself to monitor all aspects of your existence, you focus your attention on a single object. Some find this form of meditation easier

than allowing yourself to be open to every distraction and piece of sensory input around you. Again, there is no judgment or attachment. Over time, focusing on one thought, one body part, one physical object or mantra improves your ability to focus on only that chosen object.

This means as time goes on, a focused attention meditation practice makes you very good at ignoring distractions. You learn to focus your attention deeply and steadily, which provides incredible mental benefits that you can apply to every aspect of your life. Some examples of focused attention meditation are Loving Kindness, Kundalini and a few forms of Qigong meditation.

Which Type Is Best for Me?

The answer to this is very simple - whatever type of meditation works for you right now is what you should be practicing. Everyone is different. You may find that focused attention makes the most sense for you now, but over time you tend to experience more benefits from open monitoring. The key is to try something, practicing different types of meditation until you find one that works for you. The mental, physical and spiritual benefits of meditation are not argued. Put some type of meditation practice to work in your life, and the limitless benefits of this ancient mental and physical healing art can help you lead a fuller, richer, healthier life.

Why You Should Be Meditating If You Are Pregnant

Most meditation practices include instructions on how to breathe properly. You concentrate on your breathing, and this lets you shut out all outside distractions. What is one of the important physical exercises taught to pregnant women? They are taught to breathe properly to aid in the delivery of the baby, as well as to help them cope with the physical stress and pain they are experiencing.

Meditation improves breathing for stress-release and focus, and can also benefit mothers-to-be in the following ways.

- **Reduced stress and anxiety** - Did you know anxiety keeps your immune system from functioning properly? The goal is to be as healthy as possible during pregnancy and delivery. A compromised immune system heads your health in the opposite direction and promotes physical and mental stress. Anxiety and stress during pregnancy have been linked to a lower than normal birth weight, labor complications, an increased risk of miscarriage and a greater chance of birth defects. Meditation has been well known for relieving stress for thousands of years.
- **Improved endorphin production** - Endorphins are some of the "feel good" chemicals your brain releases when it feels you could benefit from a sense of well-being. They are also effective natural pain-relievers. This pleasure-enhancing and pain-stopping one-two punch helps knock out much of the pain associated with delivery.
- **Higher DHEA levels** - Dehydroepiandrosterone is much easier to remember (and pronounce) as DHEA. It is a hormone produced by the adrenal glands which supports a healthy immune system, improves mood, balances brain chemistry, and benefits hearing, vision, muscle and bone growth. It is also linked to lower levels of stress and anxiety,

helps regulate healthy blood pressure and defends against certain diseases. Meditation naturally elevates levels of DHEA, which tend to drop after the age of 30.

- **Increased melatonin production** - We refer once again to the positive effect of meditation on the immune system, because how well your immunity is working dictates how healthy you are. Melatonin is one of those "feel good" chemicals we referred to earlier, which has a calming effect that improves mood and a sense of well-being. High melatonin levels during pregnancy also contribute to a strong immune system.
- **Lowers the need for Epidural Anesthesia and Caesarian Section** - One important study showed the incidence rate of cesarean section surgery dropped by a full 56% when women meditated regularly during pregnancy. More impressive was the fact that pregnant women who meditated were 85% less likely to turn to epidural anesthesia for pain relief.

Meditation is important for pregnant women for a number of reasons. It has been linked to healthy delivery rates, a lowered risk of postpartum depression and better sleep habits. Women express a healthier mental and emotional connection to their dramatically changing body, as well as less overall tension and more peace of mind. Develop a meditation practice today if you plan on becoming pregnant, and once pregnant, meditation provides you and your baby significant health rewards.