

Reduce your stress through meditation

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Practice can help manage problems and change your viewpoint



Meditation allows the practitioner to cultivate the habit of reflection rather than acting on a stress response.

The busy physician knows that medicine can be stressful and anxiety producing.

Meditation or mindfulness is one way of coping. Mindfulness practices can increase our awareness of our reactions and help develop more skillful ways of responding.

When we meditate we notice the incessant chattering of the mind and may try to stop thinking. Some people say, "I've tried meditation and I just can't do it." This reflects assumptions about what meditation is, not the actual practice itself.

Meditation takes persistence to stay when we would rather not. Distraction and avoidance produce discomfort, but they don't really deal with problems and may serve to perpetuate them. You can have a glass of scotch in the evening, but the charts will still be waiting in the morning.

By facing problems in the present, we manage them differently, increasing our capacity and expanding our view.

Meditation is about observing the breath, thoughts, feelings and body sensations as they come and go. It is not about trying to change or eliminate anything.

Part of the practice is to relax, and to stop being carried away by our continual cascade of thoughts, automatic reactions and interpretations of events. We learn to notice our habitual reactivity and internal narrative.

Meditation helps us pay attention to the present. We experience what is actually occurring, as opposed to reacting or ruminating on the internal dialogue of the mind.

When cultivating this practice, bring curiosity and interest to arising internal and external events when you might typically just react.

Focusing on the breath allows the attention to rest on a continually moving target. When the mind drifts, gently bring it back to watching the inhalation and exhalation. This practice makes it easier to attend mindfully, off the cushion, where we spend most of our lives.

With or without meditation, stress will still occur. A meditation practice allows for acting with greater precision—to reflect before we act. In that moment before reacting we see more possibilities, rather than being controlled by our stress response.

This is the power of meditation. Cultivating a sense of gentleness and focus, we change our view about things that don't go away, stop viewing pain as punishment and with a light touch work with whatever comes our way.

How to meditate

There are many ways; this is one:

1. Decide on the duration of your meditation. Perhaps start with 20 minutes.
2. Posture: Sit comfortably on a cushion with your legs crossed easily and hands on thighs. Hips higher than knees; the cushion is high enough to allow your thighs to slope down toward the floor. You can also sit upright in a chair.
3. Eyes: The gaze is relaxed and unfocused, a metre in front of you toward the floor, or eyes may be gently closed.
4. Breath: As you breathe out, let your awareness follow the breath out. At the end of the breath, notice the pause before the inhalation. Similarly, notice the pause just prior to the exhalation. Allow the breath to flow naturally.
5. Notice where the inhalation and exhalation are most prominent (e.g., nostrils, rise and fall of the chest, or expansion and deflation of the abdominal wall) and bring your focus there.
6. Thoughts: These arise continually, such as, "I should be working" or "This is really boring." When these "events of the mind" occur, don't judge, simply observe and let them go on the breath out.

Patricia Rockman is a physician educator. Elaine Smookler is a performer and writer who has been meditating for almost two decades.

Tags: reduce stress, stress, stress medication