

Meditation: What Does Science Say?



Although meditation has been around for over 1000 years it has only been studied scientifically in recent years. There have been scientific studies supporting some of the anecdotal evidence that meditation can improve health, both mental and physical.

One of the most cited benefits of meditation is reduced stress levels. Reduced stress is also one of the most common reasons people begin meditation.

A meta-analysis of studies done on the effects of meditation on stress resulted in a conclusion that meditation can lead to small to moderate reductions in stress. This analysis also suggested that more robust studies need to be done. (Madhav)

Another benefit many people are seeking through meditation is reduced anxiety. A meta-analysis of scientific studies showed that meditation does lower anxiety. Interestingly it was those with the highest levels of anxiety who showed the most marked improvement. The authors of this analysis also suggested that further studies should be done in this area. (Orme-Johnson)

Because stress and anxiety are major triggers for depression, anything that lowers them can lead to improved mood for those suffering from depression. The medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC), the area of the brain which processes information about ourselves, such as worrying about future events or replaying past negative events, plays a role in triggering the amygdala, the fear center of the brain. The interplay between these two areas of the brain can lead to depression as well. Research has found that meditation can break the connection between these two areas by focussing on something other than the negative emotions that lead to anxiety and stress. (Deninger)

Age-related cognitive decline is a very serious issue in our society. There has been a systematic review of studies done on the effects of meditation on age-related cognitive decline and the results were promising. The authors concluded that meditation can



offset cognitive decline. However, the authors again encourage further studies in this area and that the findings should be considered as preliminary. (Gard)

The common theme amongst the authors of studies done on meditation and the effects on mental health is that more studies need to be done. Given that meditation appears to be a potentially powerful tool for those in the healthcare field to deal with mental health these authors feel that further studies could lead to the widespread use of this ancient practice.

However, no one needs to wait to start this practice. It is a beautifully simple activity that can be started today.

Visit the link below to find the various meditation/mindfulness articles and videos offered by Curtis Health on Thrive:

<https://curtishealth.com/thrive>

References:

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