

Meditation Medicine

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Growing up, the Placebo is taught throughout school systems and described as

“a harmless pill, medicine, or procedure prescribed more for the psychological benefit to the patient than for any physiological effect.”

Most students would believe meditation to be one of these placebo-only medicines, but they would be wrong! Meditation has been proven to reduce a stress hormone named cortisol through a study of 40 people at the University of Oregon. They trained the experimental group to handle stress through mindful meditation. When submitting the control group and the experimental group to a math test, before and after the training, the experimental group showed less cortisol in their saliva. Which is a direct measurement of how well they have managed stress. Although meditation seems like a placebo medicine, it provides benefits beyond what a placebo medicine can provide.

In this modern age stress is a big problem that lots of people have to deal with. Stress can be caused by an up-coming math test, a essay thats due really soon, or even a marriage. Stress causes your nervous system to respond by releasing a flood of stress hormones like adrenaline, epinephrine, and cortisol which causes your heart to beat faster, muscles to tighten, and blood pressure to rise. Its ok to have stress occasionally, but over the long term it can cause real bodily harm. Pain, diarrhea, constipation, nausea, frequent colds, and even memory loss can be caused by too much of these stress chemicals. (Goleman, Schwartz) The best way to reduce stress, other than by avoiding stressful situations, is to practice handling stress.

“On occasion, people come up to me in the hospital and tell me that their time in the stress reduction clinic was the most spiritual experience they ever had.” (Kabat-Zinn)

Meditation is basically the ability to take things as they are and accept them. Meditation is a direct stress reducer as it helps you handle stress. (Fell) Handling stress keeps you from getting any stress

related symptoms, and as such meditation indirectly provides real physical benefits to your body and health.

Brains are made up of billions of connections of neurons. These connections give us the ability to remember and process things. The more connections you have the more memories and the more capability of processing things you have. However, many of these connections need to be active in order to recall or process memories. These active connections are called axonal density. In another University of Oregon study of 45 undergraduate students and a Study on 68 students at the Dalian University of Technology in China: the study participants all learned and practiced Integrative Body-Mind Training or IBMT over weekly periods while being checked with a type of MRI machine to watch the changes of their brain's white matter. Within two weeks of mindful meditation, the participants had a measurable increase in their axonal density. As well as an increase in a protective tissue called myelin around their axons on their neurons.

"This dynamic pattern of white matter change involving the anterior cingulate cortex, a part of the brain network related to self-regulation, could provide a means for intervention to improve or prevent mental disorders." (University of Oregon)

Meditation can't be called a placebo medicine when it not only increases memory and cognitive abilities, but also causes direct changes to the user's brain matter which improves his/her ability to prevent mental disorders.

Humans have had trouble sleeping ever since their existence. Nearly a quarter of Americans are unhappy with their sleeping patterns, while 10 percent have fully-fledged insomnia. Luckily for them a study from University of Utah shows that people who practice mindful meditation have less active brain matter when sleeping. Those who believe they have better control over their emotions, mood, and

behavior from meditation benefit from more restful sleeping and nights. The study was conducted similarly to the others. They had 38 undergrads participate in practicing mindful meditation and undergoing a series of tests to understand what affect it had on them. It was discovered that mindful meditation helped them control their emotions as well as lower “pre-sleep” arousal, allowing them to sleep better.

“Researchers found that greater emotional stability, better self-rated control of emotions and behaviors and lower pre-sleep arousal (a measurement of cognitive and physical symptoms of anxiety) were all significantly associated with higher trait mindfulness. Results suggest that mindfulness may be linked to self-regulation throughout the day, and that this may be an important way that mindfulness contributes to better emotional and physical well-being”

(Dowell).

Meditation can directly affect people afflicted with insomnia or people who are unhappy with their sleeping patterns by creating a measurable decrease in pre-sleep arousal. Allowing people to sleep more at their command as they are in more control of their emotions and behaviors.

Meditation however much it may seem to be a pseudo or placebo medicine is not. It has actual physical and mental benefits like literally reducing stress chemicals in your body, increasing axonal density, and lowering pre-sleep arousal. Reducing stress is an indirect way to increase physical health. It removes symptoms like high blood pressure and a decreased immune system. Axonal density measures your memory capabilities and myelin helps protect from mental disorders. Meditation helps increase both of these. Having control of your emotions and stress helps lower pre-sleep arousal. Meaning the more mindful meditation accomplished the easier and faster sleep will come. Meditation helps with all these things and can help lead a successful and healthy lifestyle. Meditation can help with

insomnia, dissociative identity disorder, depression, and even people who simply have trouble taking tests. As you can see, meditation is not only a placebo medicine, it gives actual physical and mental health benefits directly and indirectly. Give it a try sometime.

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