



General Health Topics - HealthConditions

Meditation

Topic Overview

What is meditation?

Meditation is the practice of focusing your attention to help you feel calm and give you a clear awareness about your life. Eastern philosophies have recognized the health benefits of meditation for thousands of years. Meditation is now widely practiced in the West, with the belief that it has positive effects on health.

Two meditation techniques are most commonly used: concentrative and mindful.

- Concentrative meditation, such as transcendental meditation (TM), focuses on a single image, sound, or mantra (words spoken or sung in a pattern), or on your own breathing.
- Mindful meditation, such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), does not focus on a single purpose; rather, you are aware of all thoughts, feelings, sounds, or images that pass through your mind.

Meditation usually involves slow, regular breathing and sitting quietly for at least 15 to 20 minutes.

What is meditation used for?

People use meditation to help treat a wide range of physical and mental problems, including:

- Addictive behaviors, such as drug, nicotine, and alcohol use.
- [Anxiety](#), [stress](#), and [depression](#).
- [High blood pressure](#). A report from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) recommends transcendental meditation (TM) as one of the first treatments for high blood pressure.
- Pain.
- Managing [hot flashes](#), which are sensations of intense body heat that affect women around the time of menopause.

Most of these conditions may also require conventional treatment for best results.

People also use meditation to relieve anxieties from long-term (chronic) conditions such as [HIV](#) and cancer.

Is meditation safe?

Since [meditation](#) usually involves sitting quietly for a period of time and breathing deeply, anyone who cannot sit comfortably or who has respiratory problems may have difficulty practicing meditation. Some people with mental health problems, such as [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder](#) or [schizophrenia](#), may not be able to use meditation therapy effectively.

Meditation is not thought to have any negative side effects or complications alone or when combined with conventional medical treatment, but it is not considered appropriate or safe for acute, life-threatening situations.

Always tell your doctor if you are using an alternative therapy or if you are thinking about combining an alternative therapy with your conventional medical treatment. It may not be safe to forgo your conventional medical treatment and rely only on an alternative therapy.

Related Information

- [Atopic Dermatitis](#)
- [Cancer Pain](#)
- [Chronic Pain](#)

- [Complementary Medicine](#)
- [Stress Management](#)

References

Other Works Consulted

- Freeman L (2004). Meditation. In [Mosby's Complementary and Alternative Medicine: A Research-Based Approach](#), 2nd ed., pp. 175–206. St. Louis: Elsevier.
- Sharma H (2006). Maharish: Ayurveda. In M Micozzi, ed., [Fundamentals of Complementary and Alternative Medicine](#), 3rd ed., pp. 518–533. St. Louis: Elsevier Saunders.

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