

How mindfulness meditation can improve mental health

July 3 2023, by Joel Bobby



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Quick and simple usually aren't terms used to describe medical treatments. Yet mindfulness meditation is a fast, easy way to reduce stress wherever you are.

It's often recommended as part of a comprehensive treatment for physical and [mental health conditions](#). It's considered a type of mind-body complementary medicine. You can incorporate [mindfulness](#) meditation into your routine to improve your overall health.

Mindfulness meditation basics

Mindfulness meditation is the practice of purposefully being aware of and focusing your attention on the [present moment](#). Mindfulness allows you to be in tune with your experience—right now in this moment—and to explore with curiosity whatever sensations, thoughts and emotions are present without expectations or judgment.

During meditation, you focus your attention and eliminate the stream of jumbled thoughts that may be crowding your mind and causing stress. This focus can result in enhanced physical and emotional well-being.

Benefits of mindfulness meditation

Mindfulness meditation engages the brain. Think of it as a form of brain exercise. Just as [physical exercise](#) keeps your body healthy, mindfulness meditation keeps your brain fit. Research has shown that just five to 15 minutes of daily meditation is all you need to begin experiencing benefits.

After decades of research into the practice, these benefits have been found to include an increase in:

- Cognitive flexibility
- Diabetes control
- Emotion regulation
- Empathy
- Focus and attention

- Immune system response
- Memory
- Positive emotions
- Positive relationships
- Relaxation
- Self-compassion
- Self-esteem

The practice also affects many negative physical and mental symptoms, including decreases in:

- Addictive behaviors
- Anger and hostility
- Anxiety
- Burnout
- Depression
- Emotional reactivity
- Insomnia
- High blood pressure
- Need for pain medications
- Physical pain
- Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms
- Stress

How to use mindfulness meditation

Many people may think of mindfulness meditation as "sitting on a pillow, being still, with eyes closed." This may work for some, but there are many ways to practice mindfulness meditation.

Practicing mindfulness involves using breathing methods, guided imagery, and other strategies to relax the body and mind and help reduce stress.

To try focused breathing meditation:

- Sit down, take a deep breath and close your eyes.
- Focus on your breath as it moves in and out of your body.

Sitting and breathing slowly for even just a minute can help.

Here are a few other structured mindfulness exercises to try:

- **Body scan meditation:** Lie on your back with your legs extended and arms at your sides, palms facing up. Focus your attention slowly and deliberately on each part of your body, in order, from toe to head or head to toe. Be aware of any sensations, emotions or thoughts associated with each part of your body.
- **Sitting meditation:** Sit comfortably with your back straight, feet flat on the floor and hands in your lap. Breathing through your nose, focus on your breath moving in and out of your body. If physical sensations or thoughts interrupt your meditation, note the experience and then return your focus to your breathing.
- **Walking [meditation](#):** Find a quiet place 10 to 20 feet long and walk slowly. Focus on the experience of walking, being aware of the sensations of standing and the subtle movements that keep your balance. When you reach the end of your path, turn and continue walking, maintaining awareness of your sensations.

Mindfulness is a supportive strategy to help manage many [health issues](#). It pairs well with other [medical treatments](#) and counseling. It's a simple strategy that doesn't require a prescription or special equipment and can be practiced anywhere. Talk with your health care team about incorporating [mindfulness meditation](#) into your life, and see if it makes a difference in your health and general sense of well-being.

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Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Citation: How mindfulness meditation can improve mental health (2023, July 3) retrieved 22 November 2023 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-07-mindfulness-meditation-mental-health.html>

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