

The Benefits of Meditation

Week 1 · Yoga Wise Meditation Course

What Is Meditation?

Meditation is a mental discipline through which we gently move beyond the conditioned, constantly thinking mind into a deeper state of awareness. While meditation is often associated with relaxation, its deeper purpose is to cultivate clarity, presence, and a more balanced relationship with our thoughts, emotions, and inner experience.

Meditation has been practised for thousands of years within spiritual traditions, and in more recent times Western science has begun to explore and validate its wide-ranging benefits for physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing.

How Meditation Affects the Brain and Nervous System

Scientific research suggests that meditation supports balanced functioning between the left and right hemispheres of the brain. The left hemisphere is commonly associated with logical, analytical thinking, while the right hemisphere relates more to creativity, intuition, and emotional awareness. When these two aspects of the mind are out of balance, it can affect how we cope with both work and everyday life.

Meditation also influences the nervous system. It helps reduce the dominance of the “fight or flight” response, which is associated with stress, anxiety, and heightened reactivity. Instead, meditation supports the parasympathetic nervous system, often referred to as the “rest and digest” response. This shift can help to lower blood pressure, release muscle tension, regulate breathing, and create a greater sense of calm and ease.

Emotional and Mental Wellbeing

After a period of meditation, many people report feeling refreshed, clearer, and more positive. Situations that previously felt overwhelming may be viewed from a wider and more helpful perspective. Over time, this can lead to a greater sense of emotional balance, resilience, and self-awareness.

Meditation supports our ability to respond rather than react, helping us feel more grounded and in control, even during challenging periods.

Commonly reported mental and emotional benefits include:

- Reduced anxiety
- Reduced symptoms of depression
- Decreased irritability and mood swings
- Improved concentration, learning ability, and memory
- Increased emotional stability
- Greater clarity of thought and decision-making

Physical Health Benefits

Western medicine increasingly recognises the close relationship between mind and body, a principle long understood within Eastern traditions. Chronic stress is now thought to play a significant role in many physical health conditions, including heart disease, respiratory problems, chronic pain, and hormonal imbalances.

By reducing stress and supporting nervous system balance, meditation may contribute positively to conditions such as headaches, chronic pain, heart disease, PMT, and fatigue. It is also widely used as a supportive practice alongside medical treatment for long-term illness.

Meditation as Preventative Care

Meditation is not only beneficial when we feel unwell or overwhelmed. Regular practice can act as a form of preventative care, helping to reduce the likelihood of becoming run down or depleted over time. It supports ongoing clarity, emotional regulation, and overall wellbeing.

Meditation is now widely recognised by Western healthcare practitioners as beneficial for general health, whether or not someone considers themselves to be “ill”.

The key to experiencing these benefits is **regular practice**. Even short, simple daily meditation sessions can have a cumulative and meaningful effect over time.

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