

Mindfulness Matters, Part 2

People have been practicing meditation for centuries. Mentions of it are found in writings for all the world's major religions, with the oldest going back to 1700 B.C. Secular versions have been popular since the 1960s and have become fairly mainstream. Today, meditation is used by people to:

- Decrease stress and anxiety
- Lose weight
- Decrease blood pressure
- Increase happiness and contentment

The words “mindfulness” and “meditation” are sometimes used interchangeably, but there's a difference. Mindfulness is a **state** of awareness; meditation is a **practice** or training of the mind toward that awareness, concentration or compassion.

Benefits of meditation

Meditation leaders interviewed by *Entrepreneur Magazine* offered these tips:

- **End habitual unproductive thoughts:** We tend to dwell on frustrations such as an annoying coworker, a large workload or a difficult presentation. These negative thoughts can become habits that distract us and affect our relationships. Meditation helps us become familiar with and break these thought patterns.
- **Focus on who we want to be:** Noticing the thought patterns that come up during meditation makes us aware of habits and allows us to choose which ones to keep or let go. This awareness helps us set intentions on the impact we want to make with our lives and the values or qualities we want to cultivate. The values we choose will be evident in the products, companies and cultures that we create.



Meditation and physical health

Meditation can have positive effects on physical health. They include:

- **Smoking cessation:** A study published by the National Academy of Sciences found that people who practiced meditation reduced the number of cigarettes smoked by 60 percent. Researchers felt the reduction in stress and increased activity in the area of the brain linked to self-control provided the relief smokers needed to quit. Another study published in *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly* followed 1,000 smokers, some who learned meditation and some who didn't. Two years later, 51 percent of those who practiced meditation had quit smoking, while only 21 percent of those who didn't had quit.
- **Lower blood pressure:** A study published in the *International Journal of Cardiology* found that meditation appears to relax the nerve signals that coordinate heart function, tension in blood vessels and the fight-or-flight response, all of which help to control blood pressure.
- **Pain control:** Research has shown that those who meditate have a greater ability to cope with their pain and even reduce the sensation of pain more than those who don't meditate. A study published in

the *Journal of Neuroscience* showed that after just four days of meditation training, those who meditated reported reduced pain unpleasantness 57 percent and reduced intensity by 40 percent compare to those who didn't meditate.

- Improve sleep: A study published in the *Current Opinion of Pulmonary Medicine* found that those who practiced meditation fell asleep sooner and stayed asleep longer than those who didn't meditate. Meditation can help relax the body, release tension and place people in a state of mind where they're more likely to fall asleep.

Meditation and emotional health

Thousands of studies have been conducted to determine the benefits of meditation on emotional health. Meditation has been shown to:

- Reduce symptoms of stress-related conditions, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, irritable bowel syndrome and fibromyalgia
- Reduce anxiety and symptoms of anxiety disorders, such as phobias, social anxiety, paranoia, obsessive-compulsive behaviors and panic attacks

How to meditate

Some common misconceptions about meditation is that you have to sit a certain way, chant or empty your mind. All you really have to do is find a place you're comfortable. Let your thoughts, feelings and emotions flow. Don't judge or fixate on them; just let them come and go.

Here are just two of the many different ways to meditate:

- Body scan or progressive relaxation is meditation that encourages people to scan their bodies for areas of tension. The goal is to notice tension and allow it to release. During progressive relaxation, practitioners start at one end of their body, usually their feet, and work through the entire body.
- Mindfulness meditation encourages practitioners to remain aware and present in the moment. It's something people can do almost anywhere. For example, while waiting in line at the grocery store, someone might calmly notice their surroundings, including the sights, sounds and smells they experience.

Sources: [entrepreneur.com*](#), [mindfulnessremedy.com*](#), [ncbi.nlm.nih.gov*](#), [healthline.com*](#), [webmd.com*](#), [clevelandclinic.org*](#), [huffingtonpost.com*](#), [mindworks.org*](#)

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