

Meditation for Health

WHAT IS MEDITATION

Meditation can be defined as a practice by which the activity of conscious mind ceases, and the mind enters into pure cosmic consciousness. It is a technique by which the wayward destructive mind can be diverted into planned, constructive channels. When the mind has been trained to remain fixed on a specific internal or external location, then it acquires the power of flowing in an unbroken current towards that point. This state is called meditation. Meditation relieves all types of physical, physiological and psychological stress and gives a deep relaxation, which can be experienced within a few days or a few weeks of practice. Meditation has been proved to help in treating psychosomatic diseases, degenerative diseases, and even cancer.



Many scientists have investigated meditation in various aspects. More than a thousand research studies have been conducted on meditation. In 1957, Dr Kasamatsu, a neurophysiologist of Japan, and in 1968, Dr Sugi and Akutsu, Japanese physiologists, researched Zen Meditation. Dr S. Anand, China, Baldev Singh from All India Institute of Medical Sciences of New Delhi in 1961, did research on Yogic Meditation. Dr Robert Keith Wallace, at the University of California, in 1970, Dr Herbert Benson at Harvard Medical School, in 1972 Dr Jean Paul Banquet, a Neurophysiologist from the U.S.A. have done valuable research on Transcendental meditation.

Meditation produces various physiological changes, which provide deep relaxation of mind and body. During meditation, oxygen consumption decreases by 20% within three minutes of meditation, thereby resulting in a decrease in metabolic rate. Cardiac output decreases significantly with a mean decrease of about 25%. The heart rate shows a mean decrease of about five beats per minute. The respiratory rate decreases with a mean decrease of 3 breaths per minute. Respiration becomes slow and shallow. The blood pressure tends to decrease with intermediate fluctuations. Electromyogram (EMG) indicates a deep relaxation of muscles. The sympathetic nervous system is relaxed, with lower levels of the stress hormones adrenaline and noradrenaline. Researchers speculate that meditation may modulate and control the lower centres of the brain like the limbic system, the central ring-shaped structure in the brain that regulates unconscious and automatic function.

MEDITATION TECHNIQUE

Meditation is said to be of three kinds: Sthula (gross), Jyothi (of light) and Sukshma (subtle). Sthula Dhyana is said to be meditating on a concrete image, and Jyothi Dhyana is on the light. Sukshma Dhyana involves fixing the gaze between the eyebrows (inside) and meditating on the Atman.

Mastery of posture, breathing and senses, and following Yamas, Niyamas will be beneficial for meditation. However, for health, meditation can be done directly by all people. Meditation is essentially a simple technique, and yet can be mystical and profound in its results.

Meditation can be done in the morning or evening. The best time is between 4 – 6 AM. It should be done at least 20 minutes to 1 hour. A separate room for meditation, regularity of time, place and practice are essential. At first, meditation is best done for up to 20 minutes, but longer periods become possible with practice. A relaxed and unhurried attitude is important since slowing down and observing the mind is central to the philosophy behind meditation.