

Introduction to Meditation

What is Meditation?



- A journey from activity to silence.
- A practice to train our attention and awareness.
- An opportunity to de-stress the mind.
- The unfoldment of our inner potential.
- Reconnection with the essential Self.

Body, Mind, and Soul

The choices we make about our experiences change our bodies, including our choices about:



- Food
- Personal relationships
- Sensory experiences
- Sleep
- Work
- Social interactions
- Daily routine

Body, Mind, and Soul

The six most important pillars of health to focus on in our daily lives are:

- Sleep
- Meditation
- Mindful Movement
- Healthy Emotions
- Grounding/Connection to Nature
- Optimal Nutrition



The Benefits of Meditation

Current scientific research validates that having a regular meditation practice produces tangible benefits for mental and physical health, including:

- Improved immune function
- Reduced worry, anxiety and depression
- Increased rejuvenating, anti-aging hormones
- Better cognitive skills
- More meaningful relationships
- Enlightenment
- Meditation can even change gene expression to promote healing, self-regulation, and homeostasis (balance).



Telomeres

- Chromosomes carry all the information a cell needs to grow, exist, and thrive.
- When chromosomes are healthy, our cells are healthy.
- Vibrant, healthy cells are the foundation of a healthy body.
- Telomeres are the end caps of chromosomes and protect them from fraying, like the end caps of shoelaces.
- Meditation is proving to protect and lengthen telomeres, thus increasing the protection of each chromosome.



Meditation and Gene Expression



- The mind and emotions affect gene activity and expression.
- We can take control of our mind and emotions through meditation.
- Meditation can help alter gene expression so that certain gene-related diseases may not manifest.
- Through meditation and other lifestyle practices, we can influence 95% of our gene expression, thus taking control of our lives and overall health.

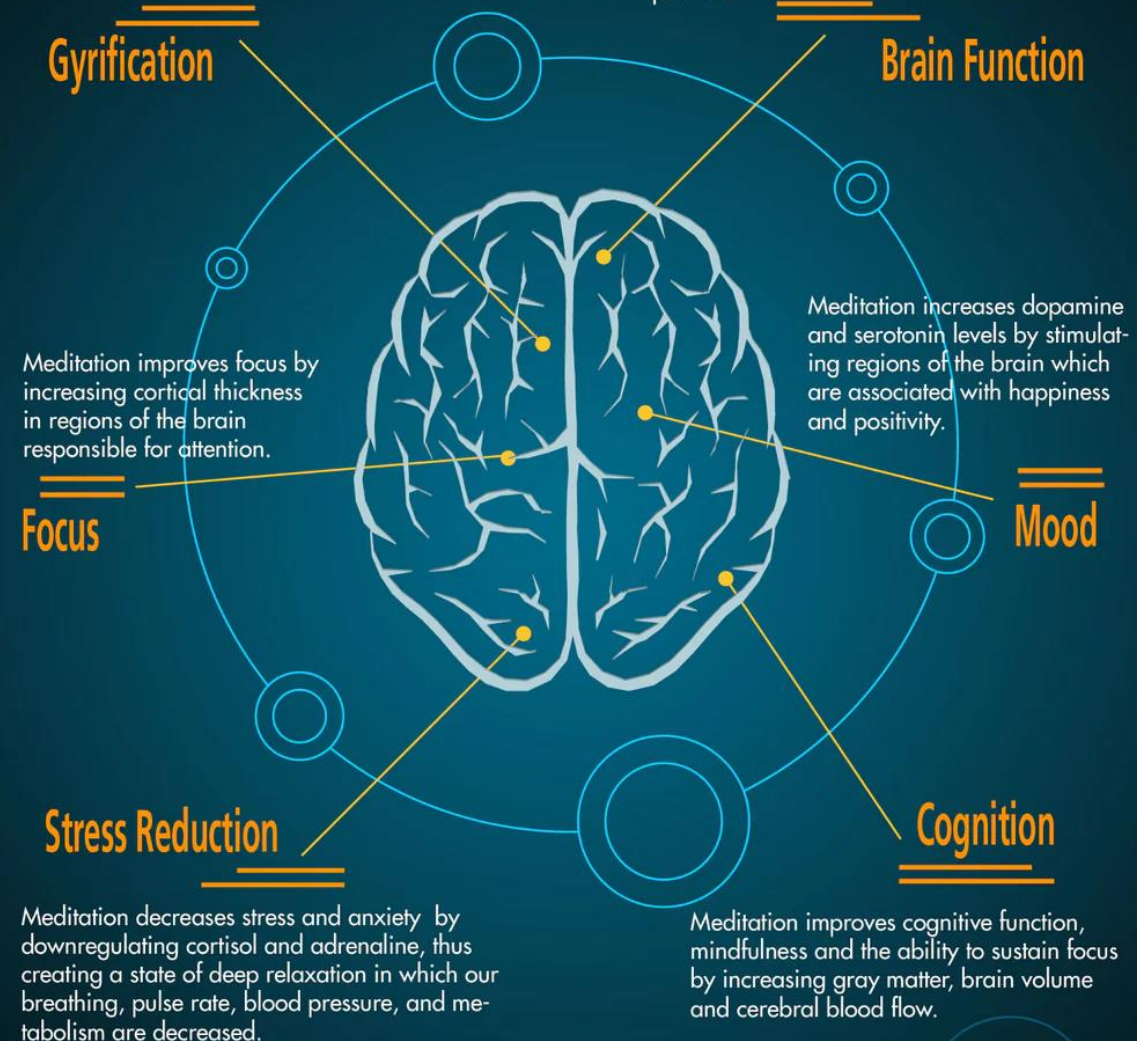
Mindfulness Stress Reduction - Brain

- Participants engaged in an 8-week mindfulness study.
- Meditation, body awareness, and gentle yoga
- MRI scans before and after
- Findings: Increased plasticity, gray matter density in learning, memory and emotional regulation.

THE EFFECTS OF MEDITATION ON THE BRAIN

MRI scans have shown that meditation increases Gyrification, or cortical folding, which allows the brain to process information faster. The extent of gyrification is positively related to intelligence.

Meditation increases whole brain function by synchronizing the right and left hemispheres of the brain while increasing balance and amplitude in alpha, theta and delta brain-wave patterns.



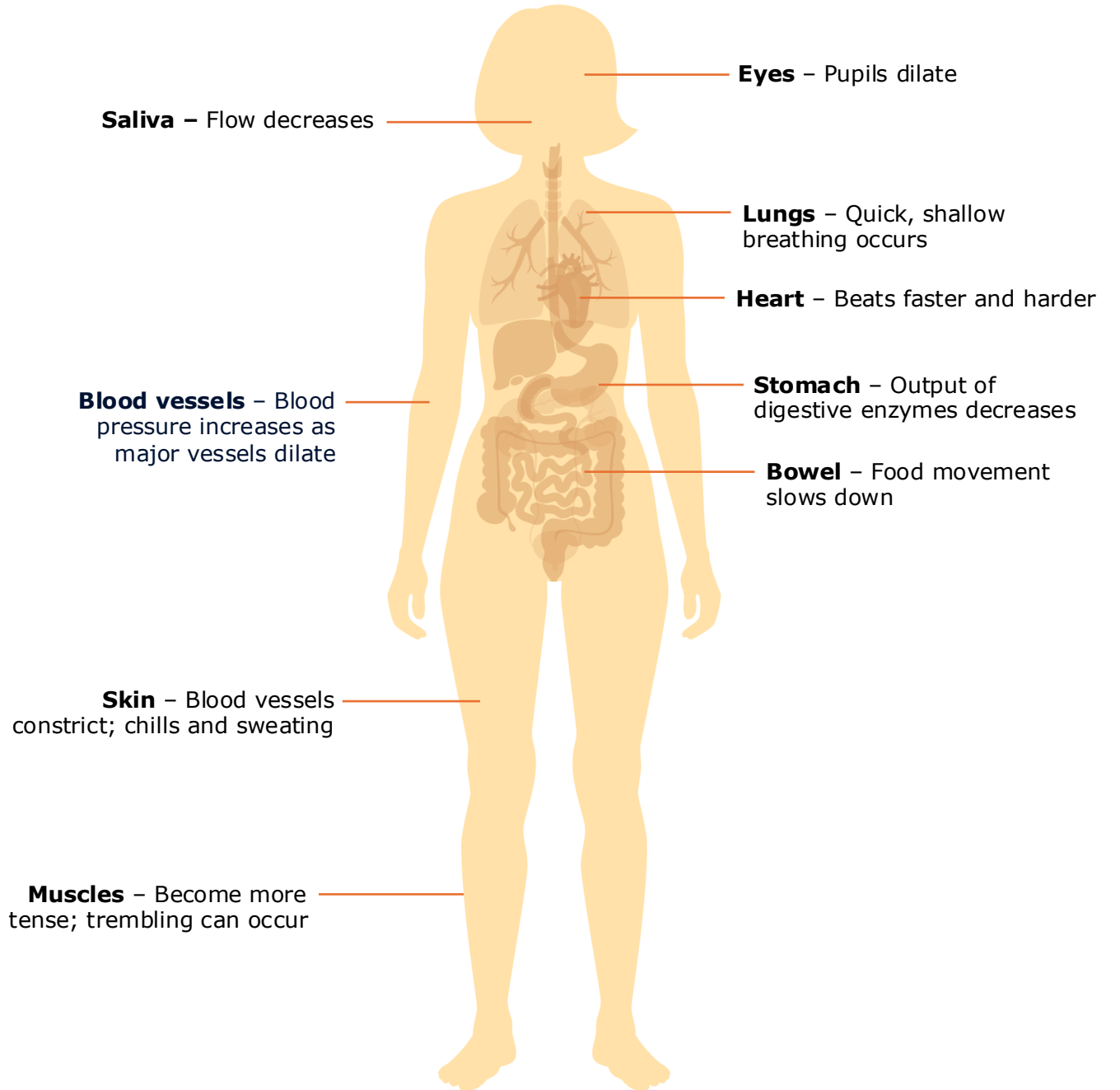
What is stress?

- Stress results from perceiving obstacles to the fulfillment of our needs and desires.
- Through the “fight/flight/freeze” response, our bodies respond to these perceived obstacles or threats.
- What stresses are you experiencing right now?
- How do they make you feel?



Fight/Flight/Freeze

- In response to stress:
- The heart beats faster/pumps blood more quickly
- The blood pressure rises
- We consume more oxygen and expel more carbon dioxide
- Perspiration increases
- The adrenal glands pump out adrenaline, noradrenaline, and cortisol
- The immune system becomes suppressed
- Blood platelets become stickier



The Fight Response

- Humans naturally defend against threats and when we respond to a threat by fighting, we exhibit:
 - Irritability
 - Loss of temper
 - Defensiveness



The Flight Response

- When we respond to a threat by fleeing, we tend to:
 - Avoid the threat
 - Become anxious
 - Become fearful



The Freeze Response

- Sometimes, when perceiving a threat, we defend ourselves by freezing.
 - Numbing
 - Detachment
 - Giving up easily



The Seeds of Illness

Change in Physiology	Contributes to
Increased blood pressure, heart stress	Coronary heart disease
Increased stress hormones	Anxiety, insomnia, addictions
Increased blood sugar	Diabetes, obesity
Decreased circulation to digestive tract	Digestive disturbances
Decreased growth and sex hormones	Premature aging
Decreased immunity	Infections, cancer
Increased sticky platelets	Heart attacks, strokes

Restful Awareness

During meditation, the body shifts into a state of restful awareness which counterbalances the fight/flight/freeze response.

- The heart rate slows/pumps blood more slowly
- Blood pressure normalizes
- Perspiration decreases
- Adrenal glands produce less adrenaline and cortisol
- Immune function improves
- Breathing slows down
- Platelet function normalizes



Restful Awareness

Fight/Flight/Freeze	Restful Awareness
↑ Up: Heart rate	↓ Down: Heart rate
↑ Up: Blood pressure	↓ Down: Blood pressure
↑ Up: Respiration	↓ Down: Respiration
↑ Up: Perspiration	↓ Down: Perspiration
↑ Up: Stress hormones	↓ Down: Stress hormones
↓ Down: Anti-aging hormones	↑ Up: Anti-Aging hormones
↑ Up: Platelet stickiness	↓ Down: Platelet stickiness

How to Prepare for Meditation



- Meditation can be practiced anywhere.
- Meditation is best practiced in a comfortable seated position with your eyes closed.
- Use pillows and blankets if needed.
- Avoid lying down unless you are unable to sit upright comfortably.
- Minimize potential distractions such as phones, music, and television.

What is a Mantra?

- A mantra is a thought with no particular meaning.
- Most thoughts have a sound and a meaning.
- Meaning holds the mind at the active thinking level.
- When thinking a mantra, there is nothing to hold the mind at the active thinking level.
- So *Hum* is a mantra meditation using the vibration of the breath.



How to Meditate

- Sitting comfortably with your eyes closed, gently introduce the silent repetition of the mantra, *So Hum*.
- On the inhale, mentally repeat the word, *So*. On the exhale, mentally repeat the word, *Hum*.
- When you become aware you have drifted away to other thought sounds, or sensations, gently return your attention to your breath and the repetition of *So Hum*.
- End your meditation by letting go of the mantra.
- Remain with your eyes closed for a few minutes, then gently move back into activity.
- Use a watch or meditation app to time your meditations and always allow for proper time to come out of meditation – even if it means ending meditation early.



Experiences

You can have several different experiences during meditation:

- Repeating the Mantra
- Thinking thoughts and restlessness
- Falling asleep
- Slipping into the “Gap”



Expectations

- Avoid seeking a particular experience or result during meditation.
- Approach meditation with innocence and non-judgment.
- Each meditation is unique and will be best suited for you at that moment.
- Practice effortlessness and allow the natural process to unfold.



Enlivening Health



- The six pillars of health allow you to access your deepest potential for health.
- One of the foundational practices of an Ayurvedic lifestyle is meditation.
- The key to meditation is to be effortless.
- Meditation enriches all aspects of your life.

We don't sit in meditation to become good meditators. We sit in meditation so that we'll be more awake in our lives." Pema Chödrön