



THE LILIAN AND BENJAMIN HERTZBERG PALLIATIVE CARE INSTITUTE
Massage Therapy Program



THE EFFECTS OF STRESS AND THE THERAPEUTIC BENEFITS OF A MEDITATION PRACTICE

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Meditation is a specific way of “paying attention” (Kabat-Zinn, 2005).ⁱ

Health problems or social, financial and professional difficulties often create psychological pressures that we can experience as stress. Helpful coping behaviors, such as meditation have been shown to reduce the affects of stress and influence health.

There is growing evidence supporting the use and practice of ancient healing methods that involve the cultivation of *mindful* attention and the practicing of stress management.ⁱⁱ By focusing the mind in certain ways we *can* influence our anatomy, physiology, emotion and thinking, therefore affecting the quality of our lives.ⁱⁱⁱ

Meditation

Jane Hart, M.D., in an article reviewing clinical applications for meditation, explains:

Science has also demonstrated, particularly in the last 40 years, that meditation can have a positive effect on health and can alter human psychologic and physiologic states such as heart and respiratory rates, brainwave patterns, and core body temperature.^{iv}

By focusing our attention in a mindful and non-judgmental way we can release stress and tension. By practicing meditation, we are teaching our minds and bodies to relax. This is relaxation is important to our well being because our mind and body repair most effectively during periods of rest.

In practicing Mindfulness meditation we are also training ourselves to be more mindful in every day activities and interactions.

Mindfulness meditation has been studied extensively. Although it is a simple technique to learn, it must be practiced regularly to be of lasting value.^v With this exercise you are cultivating and refining you attention and your awareness.

MINDFULNESS MADE SIMPLE

- ☯ Have your body in a comfortable position: sitting or lying.
- ☯ Begin by noticing the activity of the mind
- ☯ Throughout practice time--commit to a NONJUDGMENTAL ATTITUDE
- ☯ Bring your attention to your breath, its coming in; its going out
- ☯ Keep your focus on the breath
- ☯ Allow thoughts to simply pass through the mind with awareness/mindfulness/consciousness—just notice the thoughts without judging them.
- ☯ When you notice you got distracted (e.g., thinking, fantasizing or judging) bring your attention back to the breath.
- ☯ Practice this exercise one to twenty minutes daily
- ☯ Informal practice can be done often (e.g., when waiting or before you get out of bed in the morning)

References

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- ⁱ Kabat-Zinn, Jon. (2005) Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain and Illness (15th ed.). (pp. 21). New York: Bantam Books,.
- ⁱⁱ See: Mind and Life Institute. < www.mindandlife.org >. This organization does controlled research on the practice of meditation and its affects on such things as pain, depression, and anxiety.
- ⁱⁱⁱ See: Center for Mindfulness at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. This is said to be “the oldest and largest academic medical center-based stress reduction program in the country.” <<http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/index.aspx> >
- ^{iv} Hart, J. Clinical Applications for Meditation. Mary Ann Liebert, Inc <http://www.liebertonline.com/doi/abs/10.1089/act.2006.13104>
- ^v For current research on meditation see: Mind and Life Institute < <http://www.mindandlife.org> >

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