

20 Scientific Reasons to Start Meditating Today

Emma Sepalla Ph.D.

PsychologyToday.com

I started meditating soon after 9/11. I was living in Manhattan, an already chaotic place, at an extremely chaotic time. I realized I had no control over my external environment. But the one place I did have a say over was my mind, through meditation. When I started meditating, I did not realize it would also make me healthier, happier, and more successful. Having witnessed the benefits, I devoted my PhD research at Stanford studying the impact of meditation. I saw people from diverse backgrounds from college students to combat veterans benefit. In the last 10 years, hundreds of studies have been released. Here are 20 scientifically-validated reasons you might want to get on the bandwagon today:

It Boosts Your HEALTH

1 - Increases immune function

Alterations in Brain and Immune Function Produced by Mindfulness Meditation
10.1097/01.PSY.0000077505.67574.E3 Psychosomatic Medicine July/August 2003 vol. 65 no. 4 564-570

Conclusions: These findings suggest that meditation may change brain and immune function in positive ways and underscore the need for additional research.

2 - Decreases Pain

Brain Mechanisms Supporting Modulation of Pain by Mindfulness Meditation
J Neurosci. 2011 April 6; 31(14): 5540–5548.
doi: [10.1523/JNEUROSCI.5791-10.2011](https://doi.org/10.1523/JNEUROSCI.5791-10.2011)

Conclusions: Taken together, these data indicate that meditation engages multiple brain mechanisms that alter the construction of the subjectively available pain experience from afferent information.

3 - Decreases Inflammation at the Cellular Level

A comparison of mindfulness-based stress reduction and an active control in modulation of neurogenic inflammation Melissa A. Rosenkranz^a Richard J. Davidson^{a, b, c}, Donal G. MacCoon^a, John F. Sheridan^d, Ned H. Kalin^c, Antoine Lutz^a

Conclusions: Mindfulness training, compared to a well-matched control condition, is a better buffer of the effects of psychological stress on neurogenic inflammation.

It Boosts Your HAPPINESS

4 -Increases Positive Emotion

Positive emotions, induced through loving-kindness meditation, build consequential personal resources. Fredrickson, Barbara L.; Cohn, Michael A.; Coffey, Kimberly A.; Pek, Jolynn; Finkel, Sandra M. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol 95(5), Nov 2008, 1045-1062. doi: [10.1037/a0013262](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013262)

Conclusions: Results showed that this meditation practice produced increases over time in daily experiences of positive emotions, which, in turn, produced increases in a wide range of personal resources (e.g., increased mindfulness, purpose in life, social support, decreased illness symptoms).

5 - Decreases Depression

Cognitive Therapy and Research
August 2004, Volume 28, Issue 4, pp 433-455

The Effects of Mindfulness Meditation on Cognitive Processes and Affect in Patients with Past Depression Wiveka Ramell, Philippe R. Goldin, Paula E. Carmona, John R. McQuaid *Conclusions:* Overall, the results suggest that MM practice primarily leads to decreases in ruminative thinking, even after controlling for reductions in affective symptoms and dysfunctional beliefs.

6 - Decreases Anxiety

Three-year follow-up and clinical implications of a mindfulness meditation-based stress reduction intervention in the treatment of anxiety disorders ☆John J. Miller, M.D.^a, Ken Fletcher, Ph.D.^a, Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D

Conclusions: We conclude that an intensive but time-limited group stress reduction intervention based on mindfulness meditation can have long-term beneficial effects in the treatment of people diagnosed with anxiety disorders.

7 - Decreases Stress

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction for Health Care Professionals: Results From a Randomized Trial. Shapiro, Shauna L.; Astin, John A.; Bishop, Scott R.; Cordova, Matthew. *International Journal of Stress Management*, Vol 12(2), May 2005, 164-176. doi: [10.1037/1072-5245.12.2.164](https://doi.org/10.1037/1072-5245.12.2.164)

Conclusions: Results from this prospective randomized controlled pilot study suggest that an 8-week MBSR intervention may be effective for reducing stress and increasing quality of life and self-compassion in health care professionals. Implications for future research and practice are discussed.

It Boosts Your SOCIAL LIFE

Think meditation is a solitary activity? It may be (unless you meditate in a group which many do!) but it actually increases your sense of connection to others.

8 - Increases social connection & emotional intelligence

Loving-kindness meditation increases social connectedness.

Hutcherson, Cendri A.; Seppala, Emma M.; Gross, James J.

Emotion, Vol 8(5), Oct 2008, 720-724. doi: [10.1037/a0013237](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013237)

Conclusions: These results suggest that this easily implemented technique may help to increase positive social emotions and decrease social isolation. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2012 APA, all rights reserved)

9 - Makes you more compassionate

Meditation Increases Compassionate Responses to Suffering

Paul Condon¹, Gaëlle Desbordes², Willa Miller³, & David DeSteno¹ In Press,
Psychological Science

Conclusions: The current finding is the first to clearly show the power of meditation to increase compassionate responding to suffering, even in the face of social pressures to avoid so doing.

10 - Makes you feel less lonely

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction training reduces loneliness and pro-inflammatory gene expression in older adults: A small randomized controlled trial J. David Michael R. Irwin^{b,c}, Lisa J. Burklund^e, Matthew D. Lieberman^c, Jesusa M.G. Arevalo^b, Jeffrey Ma^b, Elizabeth Crabb Breen^b, Steven W. Cole^b

Conclusions: This work provides an initial indication that MBSR may be a novel treatment approach for reducing loneliness and related pro-inflammatory gene expression in older adults.

It Boosts Your Self-Control

11 - Improves your ability to regulate your emotions

A randomized controlled trial of compassion cultivation training: Effects on mindfulness, affect, and emotion regulation

Hooria Jazaieri • Kelly McGonigal •

Thupten Jinpa • James R. Doty • James J. Gross • Philippe R. Goldin

12 - Improves your ability to introspect

Coherence Between Emotional Experience and Physiology: Does Body Awareness Training Have an Impact? Jocelyn A. Sze, Anett Gyurak, Joyce W. Yuan, and Robert W. Levenson Online First Publication, November 8, 2010. doi: [10.1037/a0020146](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0020146)

Conclusions: Results indicated a linear relationship in coherence, with meditators having highest levels, dancers having intermediary levels, and controls having lowest levels. We conclude that the coherence between subjective and cardiac aspects of emotion is greater in those who have specialized training that promotes greater body awareness.

It Changes Your BRAIN (for the better)

13 - Increases grey matter

NeuroImage Volume 45, Issue 3, 15 April 2009, Pages 672–678

The underlying anatomical correlates of long-term meditation: Larger hippocampal and frontal volumes of gray matter Eileen Luders^a, Arthur W. Natasha Lepore^a, Christian Gaser^b

14 - Increases volume in areas related to emotion regulation, positive emotions & self-control

NeuroImage Volume 45, Issue 3, 15 April 2009, Pages 672–678 The underlying anatomical correlates of long-term meditation:

Conclusions: Larger hippocampal and frontal volumes of gray matter

15 - Increases cortical thickness in areas related to paying attention

Sara W. Lazar,^a Catherine E. Kerr,^b Rachel H. Wasserman,^{a,b} Jeremy R. Gray,^c Douglas N. Greve,^d Michael T. Treadway,^a Metta McGarvey,^e Brian T. Quinn,^d Jeffery A. Dusek,^{f,g} Herbert Benson,^{f,g} Scott L. Rauch,^a Christopher I. Moore,^{h,i} and Bruce Fischl,^j *Conclusions:* Meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness

It Improves Your Productivity (yup, by doing nothing)

16 - Increases your focus & attention

Cognitive, Affective, & Behavioral Neuroscience

June 2007, Volume 7, Issue 2, pp 109-119

Amishi P. Jha, Jason Krompinger, Michael J. Baime *Conclusions:* Mindfulness training modifies subsystems of attention

17 - Improves your ability to multitask

Consciousness and Cognition Volume 19, Issue 2, June 2010, Pages 597–605 ☆Fadel

Zeidan^aSusan K. Johnson^b, Bruce J. Diamond^c, Zhanna David^b, Paula Goolkasian^b

Conclusions: Mindfulness meditation improves cognition: Evidence of brief mental training

18 - Improves your memory

Consciousness and Cognition Volume 19, Issue 2, June 2010, Pages 597–605

10839||Mindfulness meditation improves cognition: Evidence of brief mental training ☆

Fadel Zeidana, , , Susan K. Johnson^b, Bruce J. Diamond^c, Zhanna David^b, Paula Goolkasian^b

19 - Improves your ability to be creative & think outside the box

Baird, B. Smallwood, J., Mrazek, M.D., Kam, J., Franklin, M.S.& Schooler, J.W.

Inspired by distraction: Mind-wandering facilitates creative incubation. *Psychological Science*

20.It Makes You WISE(R)

It gives you perspective: By observing your mind, you realize you don't have to be slave to it. You realize it throws tantrums, gets grumpy, jealous, happy and sad but that it doesn't have to run you. Meditation is quite simply mental hygiene: clear out the junk, tune your talents, and get in touch with yourself.

Think about it, you shower every day and clean your body, but have you ever showered your mind?

As a consequence, you'll feel more clear and see things with greater perspective. "The quality of our life depends on the quality of our mind," writes Ravi Shankar. We can't control what happens on the outside but we do have a say over the quality of our mind. No matter what's going on, if your mind is ok, everything is ok. Right now.

It Keeps You Real

Once you get to know your mind, you start to own your stuff and become more authentic, maybe even humble. You realize the stories and soap operas your mind puts you through and you gain some perspective on them. You realize most of us are caught up in a mind-drama and become more compassionate towards others.

Myths about Meditation:

- Having an empty mind—nope, in fact, when you start meditating, you'll find its quite the opposite
- Sitting in lotus position—nope, you can sit on the couch (just don't lie down, you'll fall asleep)
- Sitting for an hour a day—nope, small doses work just fine,
- Chanting in a language I don't understand—nope, not unless that floats your boat
- Buddhist,Hindu or religious—nope, not unless you make it so
- Weird—what's so weird about sitting and breathing? Besides, US congressmen, NFL football leagues and the US Marine Corps are doing it, how weird can it be?
- Wearing robes—No special clothing required.

- “I can’t meditate” because I can’t clear my mind—no worries, while you’re sitting there you’ll experience the noisy chaos of a wound up mind that’s unwinding: tons of thoughts, feelings and emotions. Don’t worry about how you feel during, notice how you feel after and throughout the rest of the day
- I can’t sit still—that’s ok, just sit comfortably, fidget if you need to.
- I get anxious—that’s also normal, all the junk’s coming up, learn some breathing practices to calm yourself down, exercise or do yoga before meditating
- I hate sitting still—that’s fine, then go for a walk without your earphones, phone etc; or start with yoga; or do breathing exercises... give yourself time to just “be” without constantly “doing” something
- I tried and I hated it—there’s not just one kind of meditation, there’s a whole menu out there, look for the shoe that fits: mindfulness, Transcendental, compassion, mantra, Vipassana, Art of Living breathing practices, yoga nidra, yoga, insight, loving-kindness, tai chi etc...
- I don’t have time – if you have time to read an article about meditation all the way through, you have time to meditate. Think of all those minutes you waste every day on the internet or otherwise, you can definitely fit in 20 minutes here or there to give your life a boost!

Gandhi is quoted as saying “I’m so busy today,
.. so I’m going to meditate 2 hours instead of 1.”

2013 Emma Seppala, Ph.D.