

Mind over Matters Through Meditation

Setting aside as little as three minutes a day can help you stay cool when everyone around you is losing it.

FOR YEARS THE research results have been pouring in: Anxiety, depression, high blood pressure, and heart disease respond to meditation. The latest study, published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, shows that a practice that incorporates mindfulness meditation can boost attentiveness and improve mood while lowering stress in less than a week. After just five days of 20-minute sessions, students who meditated outscored their peers (who were practicing a form of guided

relaxation) on tests of attention — and reported feeling less angry, anxious, and depressed. Plus, when put in a grueling academic testing situation, the newly minted meditators kept their cool while the others watched their stress levels soar.

“Relaxation is good, but it doesn’t provide the physiological changes you see in mindfulness practice,” says Daniel J. Siegel, MD, associate clinical professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine and author of *The Mindful Brain*. Even better,

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says Siegel, there’s no need to log hours on the meditation cushion. “The brain responds to repetition with more gusto than it does to duration,” he says. His advice is to meditate for three minutes a day. “Just as people practice daily dental hygiene by brushing their teeth, mindfulness meditation is a form of brain hygiene — it cleans out and strengthens the synaptic connections in the brain.”

You can give meditation a try by following the instructions below; for more suggestions, download guided meditations from UCLA’s Mindful Awareness Research Center Web site (marc.ucla.edu; click on Mindful Meditations) or visit the Web site of the University of Massachusetts Medical School’s Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society (umassmed.edu/cfm/) and click on Other MBSR Programs Worldwide to find a training program near you. —C.G.

A 3-MINUTE DOSE OF MINDFULNESS

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- In a quiet room, stand, sit upright, or lie on cushioned surface.
- Close your eyes and, for a minute or so, notice what’s happening in your body. Do you feel any heaviness? Register any movements you might be making.
- Breathe slowly and deeply for another minute. As you exhale, remember that you’re not trying to change or do anything. Don’t worry about the various thoughts drifting through your mind.
- Listen to the sounds around you. Rather than trying to identify each one, just listen. Notice the silences between each sound. Again, take notice of how your body feels, and then slowly open your eyes.

—Adapted from UCLA’s Mindful Awareness Research Center