Meditation as Medicine

Roots:

The popularization of meditation came mostly with the emergence of Buddhism around 600 BCE.  As Buddhism spread and changed by region so did the method of meditation, eventually breaking down into three major divisions Tibetan, Zen, and Vipassana . As more modern practitioners have adopted the practice, divisions that are less spiritually based have developed such as mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) and mindfulness-based relapse prevention (MBRP).

But what is it:

It is helpful to think of meditation as a continuum; at one end concentrative type and on the other mindfulness/diffuse techniques.  Concentrative type uses a technique that involves focusing on a specific sensory or mental stimulus to the exclusion of anything else. Mindfulness/diffuse technique involves allowing thoughts, feelings, and sensations to arise while maintaining a nonjudgmental, detached, and accepting attitude to them.

What is it good for?

Studies have explored its effects on everything from blood pressure to immune function. The very individualized subjective experience of meditation makes it difficult to design study without confounding factors to analyze it’s usefulness as a clinical tool. But it has been shown to improve:

Addiction

ADHD

Anxiety

Blood pressure

Cortisol levels

Asthma/COPD

Rewire your brain:

 One study looking at EEG patterns in patients during meditation found an increase in left-sided anterior alpha activity, a pattern that had been previously linked with positive emotional responses.  Multiple studies using fMRI showed activation of the prefrontal cortex and the anterior cingulated cortex after long-term meditation practice. There is some evidence that Zen meditation also might be protective against grey matter volume loss and attention performance

1.       Chiesa A (2010). A systematic review of neurobiological and clinical features of mindfulness meditations.  *Psychol Med* . 01-AUG-2010; 40(8): 1239-52.

2.  Kabat-Zinn J (1994). Wherever You Go, There You Are : Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life. Hyperion : New York.2518–2526.

3.       Dakwar E (2009).The emerging role of meditation in addressing psychiatric illness, with a focus on substance use disorders. *Harv Rev Psychiatry* - 01-JAN-2009; 17(4): 254-67

4.  Pagnoni G, Cekic M (2007). Age eﬀects on gray matter volume and attentional performance in Zen meditation.  Neurobiology of Aging 28, 1623–1627.

Online tools helpful for you as a physician to understand meditation:

UCLA mindfulness research awareness center [marc.ucla.edu](http://marc.ucla.edu/)

Center for mindfulness in Medicine healthcare and society [umassmed.edu](http://umassmed.edu/)

Drweil.com (videos of breathing exercise, simple yoga poses and health recipes)

Nearby meditation centers with sliding scale:

[www.eastbaymeditation.org](http://www.eastbaymeditation.org/)

[baymeditation.wordpress.com](http://baymeditation.wordpress.com/)

[www.spiritrock.org](http://www.spiritrock.org/)

[hwww.sivanandayogafarm.org](http://hwww.sivanandayogafarm.org/)

Dots phrases:

Walking meditation (.meditionwalking)

4-7-8 breathing (.breathing478)

Sequential muscle relaxation (.meditationmusclerelaxation)

Breathing awareness medication (.meditationbreathing)

List a meditation apps for smartphones (.meditationapps)

In case you can’t wait to learn about mindfulness here is a little information for your shakras pleasure.

**The Principle of Mindfulness**

**NON-JUDGING:** consists in taking the position of an impartial witness to your own experience. It requires that you become aware of the stream of judging and reacting to inner and outer experiences and step back from it. This habit of categorizing into good and bad or positive and negative locks us into mechanical reactions that we are not even aware of and that often have no objective basis at all. Tip: observe over 10 minutes how much you are preoccupied with liking and disliking what you are experiencing.

**PATIENCE:** it demonstrates that we understand and accept the fact that sometimes things unfold in their own time. Practicing mindfulness give us the chance to give time and space to our own unfolding. Why rushing to the next “better” moment when after all each one is your life in that moment.

**BEGINNER’s MIND:** practicing mindfulness means to take the chance to see everything as if it was for the first time and not allow our illusion of knowing prevent us from being present to our experiences. Tip next time you meet someone you know well try and see something new in this person.

**TRUST:** developing a basic trust in yourself and your feelings is an integral part of meditation practice. Do not get caught up in the reputation and authority of your teachers. It is impossible to become like somebody else. Your only hope is to become more fully yourself.

**NON-STRIVING:** almost everything we do is for a purpose. Meditation not! Actually this attitude can be a real obstacle in meditation. Although meditation takes a lot of work and energy, ultimately it is about non-doing. It has no goal other than for you to be yourself. The irony is that you already are! Do not sit to get relaxed, enlighten or sleep better. Sit to learn to carefully see what is happening and accept it.

**ACCEPTANCE:** often acceptance comes after we have gone through intense period of emotion turmoil and anger. Doing that uses up our energy in the struggle instead of using it for healing and change. You are much more likely to know what to do and have the inner conviction to act when your vision is mot clouded by your mind’s self-serving judgments and desires or its fears and prejudices.

**LETTING GO:** when we pay attention to our inner experience, we discover that there are certain thoughts, feelings and situations that the mind seems to want to hold on to. If pleasant, we try and prolong our experience, if unpleasant, we try and get rid of them. In meditation, we try to intentionally put aside the tendency to elevate some aspects of our experience and reject others.

*As presented by Jon Kabat-Zinn in Full Catastrophe Living*