

Dealing with Stress:

Meditation

Meditation is a great and simple way to deal with life's stresses. Meditation calms the mind and the body. It is a state of being all of us can learn and apply to our daily lives. As a part of a healthy lifestyle meditation can add energy, focus and enjoyment to our personal experience. With as little as ten minutes a day, significant improvement in our physical and mental states can be gained.

The Benefits of Meditation:

There is a growing body of scientific research indicating that meditation is highly effective in reducing physical and mental stress. Here are some of the results of over 500 studies on meditation:

- Meditation practice leads to **increased strength of self-concept**. With as little as a month of practice improved sense of self and elevated mood are experienced.
- In a three month study of those practicing Transcendental Meditation at a Fortune 100 manufacturing firm, practitioners displayed relaxed physiological functioning, **a reduction in anxiety**, and reduced tension on the job.
- Regular meditation practice is an effective technique for maintaining adequate **copng with school, job, and personal stress**. Practitioners have consistently scored higher than non practitioners in personal coping skills.
- In a study of students, those practicing meditation showed a significant **increase in both math and reading scores**.
- Meditators have also scored high in **reducing the abuse of drugs** and alcohol.
- Research indicates that **meditation decreases stress, anxiety and depression**, and lessens the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- On a physiological level meditation practitioners experience a decrease in cortisol (a major stress hormone), **normalization of blood pressure**, and improved heart function.

How to Meditate:

There are many effective ways of meditating. The technique described here is a variation found in Herbert Benson's Relaxation Response, which is available in most book stores. It is a simple way of gaining greater mastery of your mind, body and life.

To perform **the relaxation response** you first need to choose a word or phrase that is calming to you. It can be a religious term such as God, Jesus or Shalom or a phrase such as "Peace on Earth." It can be a secular term or phrase, as well. Some people find the words love or peace calming. The point is that you need to choose something for yourself. Don't pick something that adds to your tension.

A note of caution: sometimes during meditation, people experience uncomfortable thoughts or feelings. You can stop the meditation at any time.

After you have decided on a word or phrase, follow these steps:

- **Sit in a quiet place.** Preferably with your spine straight. Your posture can be the traditional lotus posture or simply sitting in a chair.
- **Bring your attention to your breath.** Experience the in and the out of the breath. Just follow your breathing calmly. Let yourself relax as you breathe.
- **Slowly close your eyes.** Breathe naturally. Begin to recite your special word on each exhalation. Feel yourself relax as you exhale. Don't force your breathing! Just let it come naturally.
- Whenever a thought or sensation comes to you just **go back to the breath** and word. Your thoughts will continue to flow. You may find yourself thinking of going shopping or last weekends date. You may even fall asleep. Don't be frustrated. Just go back to the exhalation and recite your word.
- When done, **take a deep cleansing breath** and slowly open your eyes. Be gentle with yourself. Don't stand up quickly.

When to Meditate:

There is no best time to meditate. Find a quiet setting with ample time to complete your session. Most people choose the early morning or evening to do their meditating. Pick a time that suites your lifestyle, but **be consistent**.

How Long to Meditate:

Start with **five minutes**. Build up the time slowly until you can do 20 minutes. You might want to try two 20 minute sessions eventually, one in the morning and the other at night. If you can only do five minutes, don't worry. We all have our comfort levels.

For More Assistance:

If you wish to speak to a counselor about any personal issues or want to join a group, you can make an appointment at the Personal Counseling, 1303 James Hall (0203J after October '04), 951-5363. All sessions are free and confidential.

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