

Meditation and Scientific Studies

Typically, more than 500 scientific studies are being conducted at 200 independent universities and institutions in 33 countries on programs designed to develop human potential. These studies are published in over 100 leading scientific journals and have documented that meditation benefits every sphere of life: physiological, psychological, sociological, and ecological. The findings in each area of study have been replicated many times, and meta-analyses (which are the most quantitatively rigorous means to review a body of research) have found a high degree of consistency in the results. Studies, using the most sophisticated and rigorous research methodologies designed to prove causality, have strongly verified and extended preliminary findings. This demonstrates that meditation creates a wide range of benefits in mental potential, health, and social behaviour.

Research conducted around the world documents that meditation is effective for all cultural and ethnic groups. All age groups benefit. Infants of meditating parents show an increased alertness. The elderly who meditate live longer, healthier and happier lives.

This research is unique in the extent of its cross validation, which means that the findings are validated by many different types of physiological, psychological, and sociological measures. For example, Meditation has proven to:

- Decreases stress, validated by physiological changes such as decreased cortisol (the major stress hormone)
- Decreases muscle tension
- Normalization of blood pressure
- Increases autonomic stability
- Increases EEG coherence.
- Decreases anxiety and depression
- Decreases post-traumatic stress syndrome
- Increases self-actualization.
- Decreases hostility
- Increases family harmony
- Reduces criminal behaviour in incarcerated felons.

Physiological Benefits

- Become deeply rested, as indicated by significant reductions in respiration and blood lactate
- Significant increases in basal skin resistance (an index of relaxation)

- Is alert rather than asleep, as indicated by an increased abundance of alpha waves in the EEG.
- Becomes more relaxed outside of meditation.
- Baseline levels of respiration rate, heart rate, plasma lactate, and skin resistance are overall lower.
- The autonomic nervous system, which regulates vital internal processes, becomes more stable, integrated, and adaptable, as indicated by its increased ability to recover rapidly from the effects of stress.
- Brain functioning becomes more orderly, as indicated by the growth of physiological correlates of creativity and intelligence, such as shorter latencies of cognitive evoked potentials, increased EEG coherence, shorter inspection time, and faster choice reaction time.
- Reduction of important cardiovascular risk factors such as high blood pressure and serum cholesterol.
- Large health insurance studies have found that people practicing meditation regularly in all age groups combined, display a 50% reduction in both inpatient and outpatient medical care utilization compared to controls. Hospitalization is 87% lower for heart disease and 55% lower for cancer. What is most remarkable, meditators over 40 years old have approximately 70% fewer medical problems than others in their age group.

Other research has found that meditating individuals in their mid-50s have a biological age twelve years younger than their chronological age. Even beginning meditation practice at 80 years of age, people live longer and are healthier and happier than others of the same age.

Psychological Benefits

Numerous studies have found the psychological benefits as follows:

- The physiology generates good habits to sustain the experience of restful alertness at all times.
- Reducing anxiety, depression, and anger.
- Experience of one's higher Self
- Becomes a stable internal frame of reference, providing an unshakable sense of self even during dynamic activity.
- Become better able to see another person's perspective, yet they cannot easily be swayed by social pressure to do something they judge to be wrong.
- Tend to perceive the world more positively and holistically.
- Creativity increases, as measured by tests of both verbal and pictorial fluency, flexibility, and originality.

- Perception becomes more accurate and less driven by preconceptions and misconceptions.
- Basic memory processes improve.
- School children shows improve in their basic skills in mathematics, reading, language and study skills within a semester.
- Studies of elementary school students, high school students, college students, and adults have found significant increased IQ scores compared to non-meditating groups over the same period.
- Higher levels of moral reasoning, autonomy and integration.
- Makes a person more self-sufficient, more spontaneous, more productive, better able of meet challenges, and more capable of warm interpersonal relationships.

Sociological Benefits

A quantitative review of 198 studies found that meditation is the most effective means of preventing and treating drug and alcohol abuse. In a study of transient, chronic alcoholics it was found that meditation produced a 65% abstinence rate and another study of high school and college drug users in a rehabilitation centre found an 89% reduction in drug usage.

A study of war veterans with post-traumatic adjustment problems found that meditation produced significant decreases in emotional numbness, alcohol consumption, family problems, insomnia, unemployment, and overall post-traumatic stress disorder, in comparison to those receiving psychotherapy.

The Japanese Ministry of Labour commissioned a five-month study of the effects of meditation on 447 of their employees in a major heavy industry. The study found decreased physical complaints, decreased anxiety, decreased depression, decreased smoking, decreased insomnia, decreased digestive problems, and a decreased tendency towards neurosis and psychosomatic problems among those who meditating compared to non-meditating groups.

The meditation program has been widely used for effective prison rehabilitation. Studies indicate that it produces positive changes in health, personality development, behaviour, and reduced recidivism (lower return to prison) among inmates. One study of recidivism found that 259 inmates of Folsom and San Quentin prisons and Deuel Vocational Institute in California, who practiced meditation had 35-40% fewer new prison terms compared to the matched controls, whereas it is known that traditional prison education, vocational training, and psychotherapy do not consistently reduce recidivism. A large scale study of 11,000 prisoners and 900 staff officers in Senegal, West Africa in 1987 found that meditation decreased prison violence, health problems and that it reduced recidivism to a low value of 8%.

Ecological Changes

The most important single ecological consideration is a pervasive field of collective consciousness-- the collective influence of the consciousness of individuals that comprise a society. Stressed individuals create an atmosphere of stress in collective consciousness that reciprocally affects the thinking and actions of every individual in that system. Thus, crime, drug abuse, armed conflict, and other problems of society are more than just the problem of individual criminals, drug users, and conflicting factions in society. Such problems are more fundamentally symptoms of stress in collective consciousness.

The only practical way to handle large-scale problems is to approach them holistically by creating coherence in collective consciousness. 1% of the population practicing meditation and as few (as the square root of 1% collectively practicing meditation would be enough to create an influence of coherence in collective consciousness capable of neutralizing the stresses that are the root cause of social problems. Extensive scientific research on the city, state, national, and international levels have confirmed this data. A study of 160 US cities found a significant reduction in crime trends from 1974 to 1978 in proportion to the number of people in the city who had practiced meditation before from 1973. The study was controlled for demographic variables known to influence crime.

Research has further demonstrated that when groups practicing meditation are introduced into a city, state, or country anywhere in the world that crime decreases, there are fewer traffic accidents, and the quality of life improves in that area.

This remarkable body of research showing that meditation produces basic improvements on all levels of life--health, mental potential, social behaviour, and world peace-- so that life may be lived in accord with Natural Law, creating a state of Heaven on Earth.

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