

MINDFULNESS MEDITATION will help you manage stress and thereby reduce inflammation and pain. Measurable positive results require a commitment to daily practice of one year.

Mindfulness Meditation is recommended by Dr. Leonard Calabrese, Director of Rheumatology and Immunology at Cleveland Clinic in Ohio. The science of Meditation is based in part on significant original research by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn of MIT. The mediation format that follows was designed by W Richard Horn, NP. Because of positive research results, Dr. Calabrese, Dr. Zinn, Dr. William Mitchell and W.R. Horn, NP are all personally committed to daily meditation practice. Dr. William Mitchell describes in detail the science of meditation on the verso of this introduction to meditation practice.

Meditation helps us to learn to avoid negative emotions in the face of stress and to eliminate habits and mental formations that promote inflammation. We want to avoid reflexive reaction to stress and instead respond with considered intention. Besides excessive emotional responses to stress (“road rage” is an extreme example), other activities that promote systemic inflammation include what we eat and drink. Prime examples of inflammatory foods and drinks include all grains (wheat, rice, etc.), dairy products, alcohol, sodas, sugar, artificial sweeteners and chemical food additives.

The following is a simple but effective meditation form. Rise early at the same time each day. Sit in your same quiet spot. Sit erect and leaning a little forward away from the back of the chair. You may also sit on a cushion on the floor. Be at peace.

1. Sit erect with eyes closed or open. You may begin with a brief reading (1-2 minutes) of an inspiring or comforting text from your religion, philosophy or favorite poet. Read for 1-2 minutes.
2. Then give prayers of thanks for the day, and the love of family and friends. Send prayers of loving kindness and compassion to all persons including those you disagree with. Forgive yourself for any past mistakes. You are only human, and we make mistakes generally out of ignorance. Forgive those that hurt you whether they are family members, friends, a former spouse, lovers or strangers.
3. Start your mindfulness meditation. Set your timer for a period of 3-5 minutes. As time goes on you may increase 10 or 15 minutes. The purpose of this meditation exercise is to quiet your mind, improve focus and help improve the way you manage stress. Begin by following your breath - in and out, in and out like the movement of open waves. You may count your breathing cycle at the end of each exhalation. You will be distracted by random thoughts. Do not be concerned; gently return your focus to your breath. When your alarm sounds your meditation has ended.
4. Now read silently or aloud, your life goals or habits you wish to change. These hopes for personal change you previously prepared on a small card or cards. One to three such goals would be good. Here are some examples: a) I will not smoke tobacco today. b) I will not drink any alcohol or soda of any kind today. c) I will not eat or drink any dairy products today. d) I will not eat any bread, rice or cereal today. Regarding inflammatory foods and drinks, you may choose to indulge in one occasionally - such as once in one to two weeks. You may also choose to have a career goal.
5. Repeat these same goals daily for several days, weeks and even months until you feel the desired change is complete and you have eliminated the daily habit, or you have reached your goal.



Mindfulness and meditation practices can help heal your immune system

Have you heard of your autonomic system? You sure have. They are better known to you as your autopilot nervous system or your “fight and flight” and “rest and digest” responses.

We live in a world that produces an environmental mismatch of sorts. Prior to modern living, we had an appropriate balance between these two branches of our nervous system.

Today, we have so much stimuli that mimic the same response to famine, war, drought and large predators. Standing in line at a grocery store, working a job that stresses us out, rushing through traffic, trying to meet constant deadlines, financial stress and toxic relationships. All these things have one common thread - they result in chemistry that harms our body based on our minds perception of these stimuli and the meaning we attach to them.

The body interprets all these signals in this mismatch sort of soup the same. We secrete adrenaline and stress hormones which dysregulate our immune system. And in those of us with certain genetics, perpetuate chronic inflammatory disease - lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, Sjogren's psoriasis and more.

How this dysregulation occurs is through an overabundance of inflammatory cytokines. Cytokines are like text messages that your immune system secretes that result in inflammation. They have names like interleukin-1, interleukin-6, and TNF-alpha. You may be aware that some of the medications you might be taking to block these text messages.

But there is another way to suppress these cytokines and make your immune system healthy again. Meditation has been shown to alter our immune system in a positive way, decreasing these inflammatory text messages and decreasing disease activity.

In one study by Fogarty and friends, women with rheumatoid arthritis who participated in meditation on a weekly basis reduced their CRP levels (a marker for inflammation) and decreased disease activity.

Jedel and friends showed that patients with ulcerative colitis who practiced 2 hours per week had less flares and decreased levels of CRP, interleukin-6 and fecal calprotectin.

There are numerous publications revealing the merits of meditation and mindfulness-based practices in helping you reduce inflammation. Just like your body requires clean food, air and water, we now live in a world where the body requires a powerful stress management technique like meditation in order to function healthfully.

Like any other skill, meditation takes practice. A little bit every day goes a long way! Perhaps long enough to reduce flaring of your disease, minimize your need for medication and improve the quality of your life.

Happy meditating!

William Mitchell ND, W Richard Horn, NP

Black, David S., and George M. Slavich. "Mindfulness meditation and the immune system: a systematic review of randomized controlled trials."

