

NEW RESEARCH SUGGESTS THAT MEDITATION CAN ALTER YOUR BRAIN FOR THE BETTER

Meditation is life-changing and affirming for the millions of people who practice it. Recently, there's been some fascinating research into how practicing meditation can actually make positive changes to your brain's structure.

The academic journal *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging* recently published a study about meditation. This study, completed by Massachusetts General Hospital clinicians, looked at a small number of subjects and used brain imaging equipment to look at their brains before and after an 8-week meditation class.

The results were astonishing: *for meditators, the areas of the brain that focus on being compassionate toward others and being self-aware got larger and the brain areas devoted to stress actually got smaller.* Experts are so sure of the positive mind-altering benefits of meditation that it's beginning to be taught in some grade schools.

For vibrant health, it seems that meditation should rank up there with your diet and exercise goals!

Follow these tips to get started with meditation so you, too, can enjoy its positive benefits:

1. **Find 1 or 2 times a day you can meditate.** Before breakfast is great. Just before dinner also works.
2. **Initially, plan to spend 10 minutes for each meditation session.** You'll gradually increase your time by 5 minutes every other week or so, until you reach 30 minutes.
3. **Find a quiet space.** If you have your own den or study, that's probably a good place to meditate. Your bedroom might be another. If you have a quiet space in nature, that would be a fabulous meditation site. There must be silence or as little noise as possible in your surroundings.
4. **Ensure you'll have no interruptions.** Meditating before your kids or spouse arise might work for

you. If that's not possible, *ask family members not to disturb you during meditation.*

5. **Cover or move clocks.** Ensure you can't see them from where you're sitting. You want to de-focus from everything around you, particularly from watching the clock.
6. **Wear comfortable clothing.** Stretchy or baggy clothing like athletic wear often works fine. Shoes or socks are not necessary. However, if you think your feet are going to get cool, go ahead and wear socks.
7. **Get into a comfortable position.** Most people find that sitting on carpeting, a soft rug, or a yoga mat works best. If you feel you need to lean against something, try sitting on the floor while leaning against your bed or sofa.
 - Cross your legs Indian-style if it's comfortable for you. Either clasp your hands loosely in your lap or extend your arms to balance the top of your wrists on your knees, with your hands gently cupped upward.
8. **Use a gentle-sounding timer.** Many people like an external stimulus to signal the end of their meditation session. However, avoid startling

yourself after you meditate since it defeats the purpose of meditating in the first place. Most cell phones these days have a wide variety of timer sounds with a few of them on the gentler side.

- For example, sounds like a harp, sonar alarm, gong, or xylophone are particularly helpful to use when emerging from meditation.

9. **Meditate.** The scene is set. Get comfortable. Close your eyes. You can also stare at a spot on the wall or an object of beauty, like a vase of flowers or picture of a sunset or the beach, if you prefer. Breathe. Listen to the sound of your breath and clear your mind. ***Should your mind wander, just re-focus on your breathing.***

- After some practice, you'll find yourself going into an altered state, almost like sleeping. You'll experience feelings of tranquility. When your timer sounds, take some seconds before gently arising and going about your day.

If you get into the habit of practicing meditation twice a day for 10 minutes, every day, you'll soon be amazed at the results you achieve. Alter your brain by

meditating each day. You'll live a more enriched life and have healthier relationships with your inner self and others.