

TIP SHEET FOR MEDITATION

Meditation is a skill which, with practice, enables you to still and soothe the mind and relax the body. It can also include practices which develop attention and awareness. This trains thought processes, bringing them under greater control and giving you the opportunity to re-direct them. Meditation can lead to increased calmness and physical relaxation, improved psychological balance, improved ability to cope with pain or illness or to enhanced overall health and well-being.

Many people believe meditation requires sitting in a certain position contemplating a single focus, or simply being still, but there are many types of meditation. It is important to find the right technique for you. Many people, especially students who use their minds continuously, find it impossible to suddenly stop thinking and sit perfectly still! This can actually increase their stress as they might feel that they are “failing” meditation!

Everyday activities can be turned into meditation. Try putting all your attention in the present e.g., while eating something or doing the dishes. If you get distracted, you simply return your attention to the task. Meditation can be done whilst sitting, standing, lying or walking. Meditation can have an internal or external focus, can vary in length, be guided by a voice or a sound or you can use your imagination.

When you work and study most of the time, it can be difficult to stop thinking about what you have done, or need to do next! This mental tension can translate into feelings of anxiety and stress, which manifest in the body, resulting in muscle tension and/or headaches and fatigue. Meditation is one way to achieve inner peace and release tension.

Potential Benefits

There is a growing body of research supporting significant improvement after practising meditation, in conditions like chronic pain, high blood pressure, symptoms of heart disease and reactivity. Many students use meditation to reduce anxiety and/or “stress” and to improve mood. The benefits often depend on the intention and the type of practice.

Factors contributing to meditation practice

Your **attitude** towards the practice is important. An attitude of openness and acceptance helps you connect with the process. You need to accept that, whatever our experience of meditation, it is perfect for you at that time. If you experience peace or fear or distraction, you need to accept this experience without judgement or expectations or comparison with another’s experience. Trust that if you are sincere in your intention of being awake and openhearted, in time your practice will result in a sense of freedom and peace.

Creating a space and time

Creating a space and time, especially when you start to meditate, can assist you to develop a regular practice. You may decide to practice in the morning, when your mind may be calmer and your environment quieter. You may prefer to sit at night, to prepare you for rest. You may start at 5 minutes or 35 minutes. To create a habit, it helps to do the same activity at the same time each day for 3 weeks. Daily practice may lead to noticeable benefits. If possible, initially it may help to create or use the same space, somewhere quiet, free of interruptions. You may wish to use the same chair or cushion.



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA

STUDENT SUPPORT

www.newcastle.edu.au

Some Types of Meditation

Mindfulness:

In this meditation, the person sits quietly and simply observes their thoughts, feelings and sensations in a non judgmental way. He/she does not get involved in the thoughts, memories, worries or sensations. This cultivates a non-reactive state of mind and assists a person to be present in the moment.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation:

In this meditation, a person progresses through the whole body, tensing and relaxing each set of muscles. This trains the body to recognise the difference in sensation between being tense and relaxed in the body. It assists a person to consciously relax.

Guided Imagery:

In this type of meditation, a person is guided to imagine being in a beautiful, relaxing place, or to visualise going somewhere peaceful and nurturing, e.g. a beach, a garden. A person may also examine an object in detail, e.g. a leaf. This can soothe a busy mind and create a positive experience.

Breath:

In maintaining a focus on the breath or some aspect of breath, the mind can be trained to maintain a single focus of attention in the body. This trains a person to become more aware of the sensations in the body and less occupied by thoughts. It also trains attention.

The Counselling Service has recorded meditations online. We also run courses in meditation each semester. Visit our webpage for details.

References:

Websites;

For general information and examples of meditations visit <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/meditation/>

Tara Brach: "How to Meditate" from <http://www.tarabrach.com/> Tara Brach has 35 years of meditation and good resources on her website.

<http://www.noetic.org/library/publication-books/physical-and-psychological-effects-meditation/> for a review on research into meditation, entitled "**The Physical and Psychological Effects of Meditation**". **A Review of Contemporary Research.** by Steven Donovan, Michael Murphy, and Eugene Taylor

Books and Articles;

Transcendental Meditation produces positive effects on health, brain functioning, and cognitive development in students: David Haaga, Ph.D., Professor and Director of the James J. Gray Psychotherapy Training Clinic, American University (in print)

Teasdale JD, Segal ZV, Williams JMG, Ridgeway VA, Soulsby JM, Lau MA. **Prevention of Relapse/Recurrence in Major Depression by Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy.** J Consulting Clin Psych [serial online] 2000 [cited 2004 March 7]; 68(4):615-623.

Kabat-Zinn J. et al. (1985). **The clinical use of mindfulness meditation for the self-regulation of chronic pain.** J Behav. Med., Jun;8(2):163-90.

Acknowledgements: Thanks to University counselling services in Australia and overseas whose resources have been used to help compile these Tip Sheets.

Produced by the Counselling Service, The University of Newcastle, May, 2011.