

Why meditation is the best way to deal with stress

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With so much stress people experience in modern living, they have turned to various means to cope with them. Some resort to drugs, which makes the problem worse, or go into depression. But there is one natural and safe way to cope with stress—and that is through meditation, or what Dr. Herbert Benson prefers to call “the relaxation response.”



We have heard so much of this ancient Eastern technique for coping with the stresses of modern life, especially after it was introduced to the Western world in the early '70s. Meditation became part of the young generation's culture after such popular entertainers as the Beatles, Madonna and others publicly admitted practicing it.

Probably the most wellknown meditation technique at that time was the so-called transcendental meditation (TM) introduced by the Indian guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. He sent to the Philippines hundreds of teachers from different nationalities to teach Filipinos TM. They were even welcomed by former President Ferdinand Marcos.

No best method

The popularity of TM spawned (or encouraged) the development of so many different methods of meditation, each claiming to be better than the others.

Is there really a best method of meditation? I don't think so. There are as many different types of meditation as there are meditators. Psychologist and psychic researcher Dr. Lawrence Le Shan, wrote a book entitled “How to Meditate,” where he discussed many different techniques of meditation without claiming one to be superior to the others. He said, “Try each one and then choose which works best for you.” I completely agree with him. What is best for one person may not work for another.

I have tried several methods of meditation, from the simplest and easiest to the more complicated. All of them provide some benefits or good results. But I prefer the simplest method, which is quieting your mind and counting your breaths slowly as you sit in a comfortable chair. Soon, you will go into the alpha or even theta levels of brain waves.

Dr. Herbert Benson, a cardiologist from the Harvard Medical School, wrote several bestselling books about meditation, beginning with “The Relaxation Response,” followed by “Beyond the Relaxation Response,” and finally, “The Maximum Mind.”

Dr. Benson studied many different techniques of meditation, and came to the conclusion that all types of meditation have essential characteristics: a quiet environment, a mental device, a

passive attitude and a comfortable position.

A quiet environment is necessary to avoid distraction. You cannot meditate successfully, especially if you are a beginner, if you meditate in a noisy and crowded environment.

A mental device is any sound that you focus your mind on, if you meditate with eyes closed, or a fixed object to stare on, if you meditate with eyes open. Dr. Benson says, "You don't have to have a secret mantra given by a guru to focus on. Any single idea, such as repeating the word one-oneone, will do." It will have the same effect.

Letting go

A passive attitude means a feeling of "letting go," of not minding anything that happens outside. A passive attitude means you are focused within, oblivious to anything outside your mind. A phone may ring but you don't pay attention to it; you become passive and receptive to what's happening inside you and your mind. You quiet your mind of all internal chatter.

A comfortable position means just what it says. You have to be comfortable, either sitting down or lying in bed. I prefer a sitting position, because I am less likely to fall asleep than when lying down. Dr. Benson says you don't have to assume the lotus position of crossing your legs yoga-style in order to meditate properly or successfully. Any comfortable position will do. So, if you find it comfortable to meditate standing on your head, then do so!

Dr. Benson also studied the differences in the effects of meditation compared to sleep. He measured such factors as blood pressure, brainwaves, temperature, metabolism and even rectal temperature of people in meditation and those asleep. He discovered that meditation is superior to sleep in reducing blood pressure and stress in all factors.

This does not mean that one should substitute meditation for sleep. The body cannot last long without sleep. Dr. Benson was referring to the difference between the effect of meditation and sleep when under stress. Meditation is better. And he has proven this scientifically under controlled conditions.

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