

## Meditation can improve your health

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Meditation is the practice of controlling your breath and focusing inward.



Scientific studies have proven that it can help you manage stress and high blood pressure, sleep better, feel more balanced and connected, and even lower your risk of lifestyle diseases.

Spending even a few minutes in meditation can help restore your calm and inner peace. Here are some of the many ways meditation can help you:

**Reduces stress:** A study published in the journal 'Psychiatry Research' found patients with generalised anxiety disorder who took a course in meditation-based stress reduction had lower stress-related hormonal and inflammatory levels than people who did not practise meditation. Even brief meditation sessions can make a difference in managing stress — and it can begin to help rather quickly.

**Increases heart health:** According to the University of Berkeley, research suggests meditating can increase respiratory sinus arrhythmia, the natural variations in heart rate that happen when we breathe that indicate better heart health and an increased chance of surviving a heart attack.

**Lowers blood pressure:** A 2020 review of 14 studies (including more than 1,100 participants) examined the effects of mindfulness practices on the blood pressure of people who had health conditions such as hypertension, diabetes or cancer.

The analysis showed that for people with these health conditions, practising mindfulness-based stress reduction was associated with a significant reduction in blood pressure.

Lower blood pressure reduces strain on the heart, blood vessels and kidneys.

**Improves sleep:** Meditation may improve sleep quality.

Up to one year after participating in a meditation programme, many participants still experience better sleep quality.

To maximise potential benefits, it may help to use meditation alongside other healthy sleep habits, such as keeping regular bedtimes and keeping the sleep environment cool, dark and quiet.

**Slows cognitive decline:** People tend to lose some of their cognitive flexibility and short-term memory as they age.

But mindfulness may be able to slow cognitive decline, even in people with Alzheimer's disease.

In a 2016 study, people with Alzheimer's disease who engaged in meditation showed robust improvements on cognitive scores.

**Improves memory:** Better focus through regular meditation may increase memory and mental clarity. These benefits can help fight age-related memory loss and dementia.

**Increased attention:** Meditation allows you to stay focused longer.

Even meditating for a short period each day may benefit you.

A study by New York University's Center for Neural Science found that meditating for just 13 minutes daily enhanced attention and memory after eight weeks.

**Weight and diet control:** A 2018 analysis of 19 studies found that mindfulness programmes helped people lose weight and manage eating-related behaviours such as binge and emotional eating.

The results of the analysis showed that treatment programmes that combine formal meditation and mindfulness practices with informal mindfulness exercises were especially effective methods for losing weight and managing eating.