

Make Time for Meditation

BY DR. WENDY ROGERS, TRUE HEALTH MEDICINE PC

Stress management is an important topic that's discussed in virtually every appointment with the doctors at True Health Medicine, PC because it is THAT IMPORTANT to achieving health and wellness. Chronic stress lowers the immune system, increases risk of cardiovascular disease, decreases energy and overall sense of happiness.

Clearly it's important to not have chronic stress but let's face it, we all have stress whether it be from work, family, and/or what's going on in our rapidly shifting, dynamic world. The important thing is how our minds and our bodies react to the ever-present stress of modern life. When these stressors are consistently putting us in a state of fight or flight or what I like to call "running from the saber tooth tiger", this is when the damage begins. Part of our job is helping our patients learn methods to take themselves out of "reaction mode". One technique that almost always ends up on my treatment plan is meditation.

Meditation is a practice in which one uses various techniques to help the mind become calm and quiet during a set time period. It's known to help decrease the activity of our sympathetic nervous system, the one that is over active in times of stress. It's been researched and shown to help with everything from lowering blood pressure, improving anxiety and depression, decreasing chronic pain and helping with irritable bowel syndrome. Recent research has shown that individuals that meditate on a regular basis experience less of the standard aging of the brain with more preservation of grey matter compared to those that do not have a meditation practice. Other research has shown that the brain, with regular meditation, is more well developed in the outer regions allowing for an increase in information processing. Another study showed that meditation enhanced immune system functioning while lowering inflammation levels. Meditation helps shut off what is termed as "monkey brain". "Monkey brain" is when you experience wandering, rambling thoughts, ruminating on anything from the past, present, or future and is associated with a decrease in happiness.

That's a whole lot of positive from something in which the only real requirements are yourself, a little time, and a quiet space in which you can sit or lay down comfortably. Individuals are capable of

accomplishing this even with physical limitations which makes it accessible to most. Despite this, when discussing meditation with many patients, their first instinct is that it's too difficult, they won't be any good at it because it's too hard to turn off their brains. And here's what I tell them: I've started working on my own meditation practice and I'm definitely not very good at it yet. But like anything, it takes practice. There are times where I feel like I spend all of my time working on bringing my wandering thoughts back in line.

But despite me having a long ways to go in feeling like I'm skilled, I have still noticed a lot of benefit. I sleep better at night, my day feels less frenetic and my mind is more clear and focused. And right now I'm only practicing ten minutes a day. Those are some decent results for only 10 minutes!

Here is what I typically recommend:

- Start out "small". Work on a daily habit of 5 to 10 minutes a day. Set a timer.
- Try and pick the same time every day when possible. Routine is helpful when trying to form a daily habit.
- Try different methods to see what resonates the best with you. Some use deep breathing techniques, a mantra (you repeat a certain word or phrase in your head during your allotted time), or a guided meditation. And yes, there is an app for that. I personally have found a guided meditation phone app to be the most useful for my own practice.
- Tell a friend or family member about your new habit to help keep you accountable. And they can join in on the fun!

For further assistance in your stress management and wellness needs, contact the doctors at True Health Medicine, PC. We will be happy to help!



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