

# Meditation is Essential for Good Health



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Thanks to decades of scientific research we now know why meditation can literally change our lives.

Once thought to be purely a spiritual practice, meditation is, in fact, a powerful and essential healing modality.

When we understand how regular meditation practice serves to restore and regenerate the body and mind as well as the spirit, it also becomes obvious that meditation must be considered to be the primary healing modality.

When we are under stress (bear in mind that our modern lifestyles are filled with stressors every day and few people are completely free of stress) our brain and body produce certain chemicals that are intended to help us deal with that stress.

These chemicals are always present and essential for us to survive, but when we perceive a threat the production of those chemicals is increased. This is why we hear that people suffering from anxiety and depression have a chemical imbalance.

Our amazing bodies react to a perceived threat by catapulting us into what is known as the fight-or-flight reaction.

The area of our brain that manages the fight-or-flight reaction is part of our autonomic nervous system so we don't have to think before this reaction is initiated.

It all happens before we get a chance to intelligently evaluate the situation; the threat we are reacting to doesn't necessarily have to be life-threatening or real. It is a perceived threat and the things we perceive as threatening are different for all of us based on our subconscious belief systems.

The fight-or-flight reaction is designed to provide us with an instantaneous burst of extra power so that we can run away from sabre-toothed tigers or fight off rival tribesmen. These days the situations we perceive as threatening can be a bill arriving in the mail, a traffic jam when we are running late or even a conversation with a difficult relative!

When the fight-or-flight reaction is initiated our bodies react to provide us with ultimate power. Hormones and chemicals are released and rush through our bodies like a tsunami, giving us additional power and muscle strength.

Everything we don't need to survive during this perceived emergency is suspended. Digestion shuts down, tears and saliva production are suspended, breathing becomes shallow, and our immune system closes down.

Many other functions are accelerated. For example, our heart rate increases, additional blood sugar is produced (as fuel for our muscles), muscles tense for action, our peripheral vision is expanded and the blood in the front of our brain (the logical part) is squeezed back to activate our survival brain (also known as the reptilian brain, which is not the place we want to be making important decisions from).

The idea is that once we have perceived a threat and are automatically and instantaneously catapulted into the fight-or-flight reaction, we run or fight for our lives - all the chemicals and responses are burned up during that action.

We return to our normal relaxed state once we are safe, and resume normal body function with our immune system functioning at optimal levels, have regular heartbeat, relaxed muscles, healthy oxygenation through normal breathing, a digestive and elimination system that works perfectly and a brain that is clear and intelligent.

Unfortunately most people don't realise they are in the fight-or-flight reaction most, if not all, of the

time. This causes their bodies to function in a way that causes ill health; in the long-term this is responsible for a multitude of diseases from poor eyesight to digestive problems and even cancer. Prolonged fight-or-flight reaction also causes emotional problems and mood swings along with depression and anxiety.

There are many wonderful natural therapies including conventional medical procedures available to try and combat these illnesses and diseases. The problem is that while the fight-or-flight reaction is still 'turned on', they are fighting a losing battle.

Once we understand how to turn the fight-or-flight reaction off and return our body to its relaxed state, our amazing bodies have ultimate power to regenerate and heal themselves.

Meditation is the principal way to maintain a relaxed body and calm mind. Its regular practice not only helps us to switch the fight-or-flight reaction off, it helps us to release old, unhelpful belief systems that are often the cause of us perceiving danger (and getting stressed out) when we are not being physically threatened. So we experience the fight-or-flight reaction less when it is not necessary to save our lives.

Meditation can be practiced in many ways and through an almost unlimited variety of styles. It is a self-managed therapy that we can all practice, at any time, to improve our health and general wellbeing and aid in the recovery of illness and disease.

Next month I will introduce you to some contemporary meditation styles that will fit easily into a busy life to improve your health and increase your enjoyment of life.

Namaste  
Isabelle