

Meditation

Benefits of workplace meditation are becoming increasingly clear. Participants feel less depressed and less emotionally exhausted, and above all, less stressed. We have figured out every possible way to exercise our physical body ... the next frontier is our mind – to get the most out of our brains so we can handle the mega-pressures of the information and connection eras. Today, meditation is being used by a large cross section of society – from the United States Marines to large corporations. The benefit of stress reduction is slashing corporate healthcare costs, building emotional resilience, happiness and an overall more positive outlook on life.

Research shows that constant information overload sends the brain into the fight-or-flight stress response, originally designed to protect us from man-eating tigers and other threats. Studies showed that 50% (or more) of a knowledge worker's day is spent 'managing information' and that constant information overload sends the brain into the fight-or-flight stress response. In a high stress level state we lose our ability to make decisions, process information, and prioritize tasks.

Meditation has been found to lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol and decrease the size of the amygdala, the part of the brain associated with sensing threats and triggering the fight-or-flight stress response. Meditation has also been found to trigger physiological changes of relaxation, such as lower heart and respiratory rates, lower blood pressure, and lower oxygen consumption. There is an increase in activity in the left prefrontal cortex which is associated with positive emotions, thus increasing one's ability for focus and concentration, empathy, decision making, self-awareness, and for more adaptive responses to negative or stressful events.

Meditation is actually exercise for the mind and trains the mind to be present and go beyond all thought – strengthening the muscle of the mind by placing focus on the present. Where we focus is a choice and with practice our mind becomes more adept at staying in the present by our control. As we hold our mind in the present, the mind calms and our body will follow suit. We are then able to respond to situations rather than react to them. We can communicate more effectively, with compassion and empathy as opposed to judgment or ridicule. This change occurs naturally, and with gentleness.

All emotions are part of the human experience. In meditation we learn to be in relationship with all emotions, good and bad, and to see them as energy-in-motion – allowing it to move through us and beyond us – for greater emotional and physical well-being. It's not about being perfect. It's about finding acceptance of where we are right in the moment and giving ourselves permission to be there.

The goal for mindfulness is to realize the lasting beneficial effects created by the plasticity of the brain – allowing it to actually change the way it makes connections. In a deadline-driven workplace, empathy is often the first thing to go, as the focus narrows from people and relationships, to task completion. The more and faster we are pushed – the more need there is to maintain a healthy mind. Using meditation we can dump the subconscious emotional burden and learn to light up the happy hormones, clearing away the clouds to experience clearer thinking, improved decision making, and a heightened awareness of self to take in information effectively and respond nimbly and creatively.

Here is a simple meditation to try:

1. Sit in your office chair and bring your attention inward to your breathing.

2. Focus your attention on your heartbeat.
3. Take a deep inhale. Hold and count one-two-three.
4. Exhale out.
5. Repeat steps 1-4 and try to keep this calm of mind with you for as long as possible.

Also try taking a walking meditation. Take a break and go for a short walk. Simply walking and breathing – staying mindful and focused on the present moment. If outside, listen to the sounds around you. Notice the shapes and smells of the trees. Clear your mind of the clutter. Be mindful of what you are feeling. Focus on the positive.

Meditation can be used to strengthen our **skill of Positive Presence – the skill of adjusting and creating a positive and energized mindset within our self through conscious thought processes.**

Remember that, we can assess our personal energy flow through our feelings. Feelings such as happiness and optimism can be linked to a positive energy flow, and feelings such as anger and frustration can be linked to a negative energy flow. We can control our feelings with our thoughts. It is through our thought process that we choose how to behave. And the bottom line is ... the measurable result of a person's energy flow is reflected by one's choice of behavior.