



Meditation & Your Heart: Stress-Buster May Reduce Risk for Heart Attack & Stroke

Meditation is most often associated with Eastern thought, but forms of meditation appear all over the world. This is probably no coincidence. Regularly practiced meditation can be beneficial to your heart as well as your spirits, reducing your blood pressure and possibly lowering your risk of heart attack or stroke. **Read on** to find out more.

How Can Meditation Help Improve Heart Health?

The mind-heart connection is a complex and powerful relationship. Though the precise mechanism is still unclear, it has long been known that chronic, poorly managed **stress** is associated with an increased risk of high blood pressure and heart disease.

Meditation may reduce these risks by helping you manage stress. People who meditate routinely report better concentration, improved overall mood, and increased tolerance for situations they once found stressful. In 2012, researchers found that people who practiced Transcendental Meditation twice daily for 20 minutes had lower blood pressure, reported less stress and anger, and were less likely to have a heart attack or stroke.

What Is Meditation?

While many religions incorporate meditative practices, meditation itself is an activity, not a belief.

There are many different ways to meditate. The element they share is calm, focused attention for a sustained period of time. The object of your focus can be internal, such as your breathing, heartbeat, thoughts and feelings, or an image you picture in your mind. Or your focus can be external, such as a meaningful word or phrase (a mantra) or an object. There is no specific or recommended length of time to do this; you can spend anywhere from just 10 minutes to an hour or more to meditate. Likewise, there is no right or wrong method. The only real requirement is a genuine desire to relax and shed your cares for a time.

Meditating may sound like a challenging task in an era of distraction, but it doesn't need to be. Most meditation techniques are simple.



How to Get Started

One of the keys to reaping the benefits of meditation is finding a technique that works for you, keeping in mind that your options abound. Contrary to popular belief, not all meditation is practiced while seated in a cross-legged position. While the following is far from an exhaustive list, here are some options to consider:

- **Meditative movement.** If the idea of sitting still doesn't appeal to you, you might try **walking meditation** or **tai chi**. Some forms of **yoga** also involve meditation.
- **Guided visualization.** Led by an instructor or a recording, this technique involves picturing in detail a peaceful place, time, or scene.
- **Transcendental Meditation** is a specific type of meditation where you spend 20 minutes twice daily sitting comfortably with eyes closed. For more information, visit www.tmforwomenshearthealth.org.
- **Mindfulness meditation** focuses your attention on the sensations of the present moment.
- **Make your own meditation.** Whether it's relaxing and listening to quiet music, breathing deeply, or just closing your eyes for a moment and picturing a peaceful scene, you can find your own way to meditate.



Questions to Ask Your Healthcare Provider About Meditation

- Do you recommend meditation for my **heart health**?
- Do you recommend a **specific type of meditation** to your patients?
- What are the benefits of meditation for patients with my **heart disease risk factors**?

Additional Resources on Meditation

American Heart Association. "Meditation and Heart Health" http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/Stress-Management/TakeActiontoControlStress/Meditation-and-Heart-Health_UCM_452930_Article.jsp

Gaiam Life. "How to Meditate: Meditation Techniques, Benefits, and Beginner's How-to" <http://life.gaiam.com/article/meditation-101-techniques-benefits-beginner-s-how>

Institute for Applied Meditation: "Eight Basic Kinds of Meditation" <http://www.iam-u.org/index.php/8-basic-kinds-of-meditation-and-why-you-should-meditate-on-your-heart>

Psychology Today. "5 Meditation Tips for Beginners." <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/in-practice/201303/5-meditation-tips-beginners>

Transcendental Meditation for Women's Heart Health. <http://www.tmforwomenshearthealth.org/what-is-tm.php>

What Should I Do If I Have Other Questions?

Ask them. Contact your healthcare provider and ask all of your questions. Any time you have health questions, the conversations you have with your doctor are the key to successful results. Ask every question you have.

We hope you will use SecondsCount.org to learn more about your cardiovascular health and treatment options. SecondsCount.org was developed by the **Society for Cardiovascular Angiography and Interventions (SCAI)**, the medical society for interventional cardiologists.

SecondsCount is pleased to also provide this information as a downloadable PDF. We invite you to print it and share it with others, including your healthcare providers.