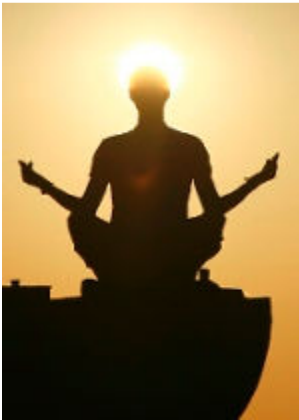


Why Meditate? Because It's a Powerful Tool For Human Evolution

By [Chris Cade](#) on Oct 5, 2009 in [Spiritual Development](#)

Special thanks to Kevin Schoeninger of [Energy Meditation Secret](#) for this guest post!



The research is pouring in on the profound benefits of meditation practice. Science now confirms what practitioners have known for centuries: Meditation is a powerful tool for human evolution.

How could sitting quietly “doing nothing” possibly make such a difference in your life? The truth is found in many dimensions. We’ll explore some of the most important points in this brief article. Of course, to fully understand, you’ll have to meditate for yourself. If you need some inspiration or re-motivation for that venture, read on.

Let’s talk about the benefits of meditation in four dimensions of our being: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. Meditation in its best forms is a truly holistic practice; it works on all levels of your being. It has the power to improve your health and immune function, increase your emotional sensitivity and emotional balance, clear and focus your mind, and strengthen your sense of spiritual connection.

Let’s go through each of these in turn...

Dr. Herbert Benson began his research into the physiological changes during meditation practice at Harvard University in 1968. He published a groundbreaking book, called “The Relaxation Response” in 1975. In this book, he described a state of deep relaxation that occurs in meditation that counters the physical and emotional effects of stress or the “fight/flight” response.

Stress activates the sympathetic nervous system which puts us in a state of hyperactive readiness that can be useful during real emergency situations. However, chronic stress is a condition that tears down the body and inhibits its ability to adapt, grow, and repair itself. Chronic stress shunts blood away from the internal organs to the extremities which hampers digestion and immunity.

Our muscles tighten into a state of persistent tension, blood pressure rises, emotions get locked into a protective fear mode, and our mind is less able to process new information and find creative solutions.

In addition, chronic stress is associated with chronic inflammation in the body which is being linked to almost every major disease, including cancer, heart disease, and autoimmune dysfunction. With the speed, pressure, and intensity of human life at an all-time high and on the rise, it's absolutely imperative that we learn to master stress and relax our bodies.

The relaxation response described by Dr. Benson activates the parasympathetic nervous system which is our recovery and repair mode. People who learn to activate the relaxation response using a simple meditation technique show almost immediate positive physiological changes. Their breathing slows and deepens, their hearts come into rhythmic coherence, their brainwaves slow and synchronize, and they experience a pleasurable sense of relief and relaxation.

Long-term meditation practice lowers blood pressure, increases the release of "feel good" neurotransmitters such as serotonin, dopamine, and GABA, and stimulates the production of DHEA, a hormone which helps the body repair and regenerate itself.

When you meditate, your body not only comes down from stress, but you feel better and more in charge of your inner life. You are more aware of your inner feelings and more able to manage them. Research at the Center for Spirituality and the Mind at the University of Pennsylvania shows that meditation practice develops the anterior cingulate, a structure in the midbrain that enables you to manage your thoughts and feelings and increases your ability to empathize with and have compassion for others. In other words, meditation is good for your personal well-being and for building strong relationships.

Meditation also develops the prefrontal lobes in the front of the brain, just behind your forehead. The prefrontal lobes enable you to focus your attention and integrate your experiences in meaningful and productive ways. Studies with Tibetan monks at the University of Wisconsin have shown increased thickness in the prefrontal lobes and increased neural connections between the frontal lobes and the rest of the brain in those who have meditated for extended periods of time.

Research at the University of Pennsylvania also suggests that meditation practice enhances memory formation and retention. This points to its use as a possible preventive measure for Alzheimer's and other conditions associated with aging and the brain.

Not only does meditation have these powerful effects on the body, emotions, and brain, but there are more profound and less easy to study spiritual effects. In general, meditation develops your ability to feel connected to life. People often describe their deep meditations as times when they feel most like themselves. They also experience themselves as part of the One Life that we all share. Meditators often describe a deep sense of trust, support, and guidance that comes in their meditation practice.