

[IMAGE]

5 Reasons Why Meditation Should Be Your New Year's Resolution

By Julie T. Chen, MD

The New Year is traditionally a time when many of us reflect on our goals and set resolutions for the year to come. From losing weight to getting more organized, these resolutions often come with good intentions, but aren't always followed through. Inevitably, we become bogged down with life's many responsibilities and stresses, and many people lose track or even forget about the goals they set for themselves at the start of the year.

A New Year's resolution that's worth making this year is making room for daily meditation and reflection. Meditation is easy to learn and incorporate into your daily life, and can be practiced in as little as 10 minutes a day. While the benefits of meditation are more than one article can list, here are the top five reasons why making mindfulness your resolution will change your mental, emotional and physical health.

1. Accessible to All

It's a common misconception that meditation takes formal training or deep knowledge in order to practice. Meditation is for everyone, and can be accessed by anyone who is willing to carve out time for it. Begin by setting a designated time in the day for meditation, preferably when you know you won't be interrupted or rushed. Create a place in your home that's calming and free of distractions, such as a bedroom or backyard; and incorporate candles or other forms of aromatherapy if you find it relaxing.

Begin by sitting cross-legged or in a chair with your spine upright and head up. With closed eyes, put all of your focus on your breathing and try to be aware of wandering thoughts. If you feel distracted, don't get frustrated; bring yourself back to your breath work and forgive yourself. Start doing this for 10 minutes a day, adding 1 minute to your practice every week.

2. Reduces Stress Naturally

It's normal to feel under pressure at times at work, school or in relationships, but feeling stressed out on a day-to-day basis is unhealthy, as it takes a toll on emotional, physical and mental health. In a survey done by the American Psychological Association in 2012, researchers found that 20 percent of Americans experience extreme levels of stress, while 64 percent agreed managing stress is important (but only 37 percent of them felt they were managing it well).

Meditation is a wonderful way to reduce stress by calming the nervous system: Putting away stress-inducing thoughts, distracting devices and our work responsibilities while meditating slows down the heart rate and allows your blood pressure to drop. This "relaxation response" is restorative to the body and allows you to feel a sense of calmness that lasts throughout the day.

3. Sparks Creativity

If you feel you've lost your inspiration for creation, meditation may be key to helping you get back on track. Meditation gives your mind a "break" from the constant insight needed to churn out new ideas or solutions. Meditation calms the chatter in the mind and allows you to get back to content creation with a renewed perspective – and even creates space for further insight.

4. Maintains Good Health

Practicing mindfulness meditation could help you curb cravings and the urge to grab junk food. In fact, practicing meditation could even help you lose weight, as it emphasizes concentrating your time and energy on enjoying a meal instead of multitasking. Eating and watching TV, driving or surfing the Internet are just a few ways our attention shifts from the food on our plate to other priorities.

At your next meal, put away distractions such as your phone or favorite TV show, and instead focus on the flavors and textures of your food. By keeping awareness on your food, you're less likely to overeat or make poor food choices.

5. Sharpens Your Focus

Have you ever experienced a midday crash of energy? Instead of grabbing a coffee or sugary snack as a pick-me-up, give 10 minutes of steady breath-work meditation a try. It's common at times for our focus to blur, especially when we juggle so many daily priorities. Learning to meditate can significantly change your ability to focus whenever you're feeling distracted.

Try taking 10 minutes out of your workday to sit quietly and in a comfortable position, and center your thoughts and energy on the sounds and feelings of your breath. Observe how deeply you can breathe in and out, and how your breath feels when your abdomen rises and shrinks. By paying sole attention to breathing and blocking out distracting thoughts and sounds, you can sharpen your focus for the next task at hand with peace of mind.

Resource

- "The Impact of Stress." American Psychological Association, 2012.
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