

Live Healthy and Be Well!

“Meditate once a day...or twice”

Stephen Jarrard, MD FACS

This month's topic is the last article in the series inspired by writings of Dr. Sanjiv Chopra in a book titled *The Big 5* - which presents "...five simple things you can do to live a longer, healthier life." As Autumn begins the softening of harsh summer toward the sleep of winter, let's discuss the great benefits of slowing down, relaxing more, and spending some time in self-reflection and positive thought – yes, you can even call it “the positive power of meditation.”

We have written many times about the difference between health and wellness. While “being healthy” may represent the absence or management of disease, to be truly “well” is that and much more. Wellness includes good health, but also contains a bigger picture approach of being sound in a mental and spiritual sense. So, while you may be or seem healthy, we don't think you are well unless you have good balance and self-support in the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of your life. If any of these areas is not in good shape, you cannot truly be said to be well.

We write almost every month about topics concerned with physical health and wellness. The spiritual aspect of your life is a very private matter, and we would never tell anyone what they need to do in this important area. But, with all the stress and strain of life these days, how busy everyone is, and how there never seems to be enough time to get it all done – we do want to comment on some techniques to keep your mental side balanced and sound.

It has been known for a long time that those who meditate on a regular basis are blessed with benefits from such time well spent. Meditation, or quiet self-reflection dwelling on positive thoughts and shutting out negative distractions, has been seen to lower heart rate, relax the body, lower blood pressure, and result in better attitudes. And no, you don't have to wear saffron robes, weave flowers in your hair, or walk across hot coals!

Just take some time every day to sit in a quiet place, minimize distractions (no cell phone!), and focus on some positive thoughts and energy. Allow the negative to fade away, and concentrate on positive things, and visualize good, pleasant outcomes in your life's situations. Think about your relationships, job and co-workers, family, finances -- and direct positive force to those areas of your life. Some may do this on a regular basis and call it “prayer time,” or “Bible study.” Some may just call it their “quiet” time, or “me” time. It is all good and will pay off in the long run.

- Meditation reduces stress.
- It improves concentration. ...
- It encourages a healthy lifestyle.
- The practice increases self-awareness. ...

- It increases happiness.
- Meditation increases acceptance. ...
- It slows aging.
- The practice benefits cardiovascular and immune health.

Early research into the benefits of meditation were hampered by the lack of good, valid studies. Often, the researchers were people who already practiced and believed in this technique – which we have discussed before, acts as a confound to a proper, scientific study. But eventually, some good studies by *Massachusetts's General Hospital* and *Harvard Medical School* demonstrated real results that can be measured and replicated. Quiet, disciplined, focused self-reflection, also known as “mindfulness,” practiced on a regular basis – has real and lasting benefits with regards to both health and wellness.

It can be used to lower blood pressure and heart rate, which is good to protect your organs from hypertension, protect against heart attacks and stroke, and help to calm down a busy mind. It also has been found to help with and guard against both depression and anxiety, which helps with issues such as irritable bowel syndrome, stress, and “nervousness.” It can relax the body, and redirect pain and soreness away from your consciousness – which can help reduce pain in issues such as fibromyalgia and chronic headaches. Furthermore, it improves your attitude and can make you a more well-adjusted, happier person as you begin to focus on good energy and positive factors, and let go of negative influences, guilt, shame, self-loathing, and mistakes of the past. Companies, such as *Google* and *Apple*, who have allowed workers to do this (on the clock) have noted increases in productivity and less absenteeism as it benefits their “bottom line.”

Take 20 minutes a day to sit and focus on yourself and think positive thoughts about your situation and your life. Quiet your mind and minimize outside distractions. Do not allow negativity to intrude into this time – only positivity. Plan changes that will make a good difference, and reassure yourself with confidence. Will it solve all your problems? Will you win the lottery or become financially wealthy? Does it cure actual physical diseases? We have no evidence for those things – but it will make you wealthier mentally and spiritually, and many rich people would gladly trade places for that, I am sure. Also, if your diseases are not cured, you will deal with them better, and may reduce associated symptoms.

At most, meditation will help your daily journey through life and make it more pleasant and easier to travel. What do you have to lose? At worst case, nothing will happen, and you may notice no difference at all. But, I am willing to bet you will come to enjoy and look forward to that time each day as “your time.” As Dr. Chopra said as he closed this chapter of his book – “If you don’t have time to meditate once a day...then do it twice a day.”

We really do enjoy hearing from you with any questions, concerns, or ideas for future columns and/or health and wellness related issues for the *Georgia Mountain Laurel*. Please send an email to [rabundoctor@gmail.com](mailto:rabundoctor@gmail.com), or call us at 706-782-3572, and we will be sure to consider your input. This and previous articles can be now be found on the web at [www.rabundoctor.com](http://www.rabundoctor.com) in an archived format. If you use Twitter, then follow us for health tips and wellness advice

@rabundoctor. Like and follow our Facebook page at [facebook.com/rabundoctor](https://facebook.com/rabundoctor). Until next month, live healthy and be well!