

## The benefits of relaxation or meditation.

I discovered meditation 7 years ago when recovering from breast cancer treatment and I have to say it was the best thing I ever did and it was the catalyst that led me to the path I'm on now. I was so impressed with the benefits; it not only aided my recovery but it helped with the natural fear I was experiencing. So I decided to take up a course with the British School of Yoga as a meditation teacher. Now I include this as part of the Pilates and Yoga courses I teach.

The benefits are amazing and there is nothing mysterious or mystical about meditation at all. Some people that meditate regularly have some very positive profound experiences and have found it life changing. It is usually considered to be a spiritual practice but it is also a very practical tool that can help us with the challenges of life. Meditation is simply deep relaxation and a focusing of the mind. I have come across many people who are a little afraid of it, they don't want to let go and relax in case they can't get on with things, or they lose focus on their tasks or business. However it is quite the contrary, it helps you to focus and helps to be more productive. It improves body health, as it boosts the immune system. Amazingly enough if you focus on a certain part of your body it increases the blood flow to that area and the cells receive more oxygen and other nutrients. I have found it helps to get my students to focus on a particular part of the body, especially if they are suffering from pain, maybe in the back or shoulders or neck. I get them to consciously relax the area and breathe in to it. Sometimes we suffer pain simply because we don't breathe correctly and the nutrients and oxygen are not reaching the places they need to. So added to the benefits of relaxation are the breathing exercises involved, which is the key to learning meditation techniques.

We don't empty the mind or become blank, we learn to focus. Lots of celebrities and stars have been practicing meditation in order to deal with their stressful lives in the limelight and many sports professionals and athletes use it to help reach their goals and improve performance.

Meditation strengthens the mind and helps it to come under control. It helps us to become more in tune with the physical body and better able to make good decisions and control stress. Therefore improving concentration and mental health.

Here are some of the benefits proved through research:

- It decreases high blood pressure
- It decreases respiratory rate
- It increases exercise tolerance, especially good for heart patients
- It leads to a deeper level of relaxation
- It aids better sleep
- It improves memory and concentration
- It reduces anxiety and anxiety attacks
- It decreases muscle tension and headaches
- It helps to build self confidence and self esteem

- It helps to increase serotonin levels, thus helping with depression and other associated problems, such as obesity and insomnia
- It helps with chronic diseases such as allergies or arthritis
- It helps pre-menstrual syndrome and problems associated with the menopause
- It aids post operative healing
- It boosts the immune system by increasing the activity of killer cells that fight bacteria and cancer
- It reduces the activity of viruses and emotional stress

There has been a lot of research on meditation and some of which has showed that the brain waves of meditators are healthier and stronger. Neuroscientists have discovered that meditators can shift their brain activity to different areas of the cortex- brain waves in the stress prone right frontal cortex, move to the calmer left frontal cortex, so this decreases the negative effects of stress, depression and anxiety. There is also less activity in the area of the brain that processes fear.

According to some research conducted in schools, a group of pupils were taken before exam time, one half meditated some weeks prior to the exams and the other half didn't. The results showed the meditating group had significantly higher results than the non-meditators.

The fact is that meditating is one of the simplest and safest things we can do and there is no right or wrong, it is just practice. I hope the above will convince you that it is worthwhile. If you are feeling less than peaceful what have you got to lose?

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