

It is hard to believe some still question whether meditation can have a positive effect on mind and body. A very selective research review recently raised the question, leading to headlines such as the one in *The Wall Street Journal* that **said the benefits are limited**.

I have been researching effects of meditation on health for 30 years and have found it has compelling benefits.

Over the past year, I have been invited by doctors in medical schools and major health centers on four continents to instruct them on the scientific basis of mind-body medicine and meditation in prevention and treatment of disease, especially cardiovascular disease.

Research on Transcendental Meditation (TM), for example, has found reduced **blood pressure** and insulin resistance (useful for preventing **diabetes**), slowing of biological aging, and even a 48% reduction in the rates of **heart attack**, **stroke** and death.

I would consider those to be benefits. And so does the American Heart Association, which last year released a statement saying that decades of research indicates **TM lowers blood pressure** and may be considered by clinicians as a treatment for high BP.

Research on meditation has also shown a wide range of psychological benefits.

For example, a 2012 **review of 163 studies** that was published by the American Psychological Association concluded that the Transcendental Meditation technique had relatively strong effects in reducing **anxiety**, negative emotions, trait anxiety and **neuroticism**, while aiding learning, memory and self-realization.

Mindfulness meditation had relatively strong effects in reducing negative personality traits and **stress**, and in improving attention and mindfulness.

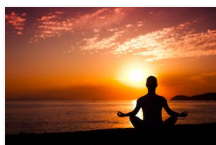
The review concluded:

"The effects found in the current analyses show that meditation affects people in important ways."

Integrative health care has major effects on mind and body

Why, then, did the recent review published in a specialty journal of the American Medical Association (*JAMA Internal Medicine*) **conclude there were limited benefits**, with mindfulness meditation showing only moderate or low evidence for specific stress-related conditions such as anxiety?

That review was narrowly focused on research showing that meditation



Meditation has been shown to positively affect mind and body

health.

alleviates psychological stress, so objective benefits such as reduced blood pressure were outside its scope.

In addition, the review only looked at studies in which the subjects had been diagnosed with a medical or psychiatric problem. The authors excluded studies of otherwise normal individuals with anxiety or stress, as well as any study that was not on adults.

These selection criteria resulted in the omission of many rigorous studies, which, when taken as a whole, show that there are indeed benefits for reducing stress and anxiety.

A **2013 meta-analysis** (a type of rigorous review) of 10 controlled studies found that at least one meditation, Transcendental Meditation, significantly reduced anxiety. And the greater the starting level of anxiety in the test subjects, the greater was the reduction with meditation.

In a commentary that accompanied the article published by *JAMA*, Dr. Allan Goroll states:

"The modest benefit found in the study by Goyal et al begs the question of why, in the absence of strong scientifically vetted evidence, meditation in particular and complementary measures in general have become so popular, especially among the influential and well educated."

I can answer that. Complementary and alternative approaches (now called integrative health care) have indeed been shown in rigorous scientific studies to have some major effects on mind and body health.

But equally important, people who use natural approaches are taking a more active role in their health. This is called self-empowerment and is what medical professionals should desire for their patients and themselves. This is the goal. We want people to adopt healthier behaviors and outlooks and attitudes, to take more responsibility.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that the majority of chronic diseases could be prevented by proper self-care. That is, by people managing their own stress and lifestyle.

Meditation benefits are becoming accepted by health professionals

In addition, think for a moment about **acupuncture**. There has been extensive research on its effectiveness in treating pain. Some of that research shows it to be better than a placebo; much of it shows it to be about the same as a placebo. But most of the research shows that it is better than no treatment.

That is astounding that people can reduce their own pain, yet medical journals are typically fixated on the fact that it is often no better than a placebo.

Finally, people meditate because it can



Acupuncture

fundamentally change their self-perceptions and sense of suffering. And, yes, research also supports this.

has
demonstrated
effective results
in treating pain.

In studies on long-term and even short-term practitioners of Transcendental Meditation, subjects report the experience of a fundamental level of unity and wholeness in their awareness. This gives them a deep feeling of **peace, connectedness and relief from stress**.

Electrocardiogram (ECG) and brain imaging research shows that meditators' brains actually function differently than those who have not learned the technique.

So to Dr. Goroll and all those who wonder why anyone would meditate, my observation, based on decades of published scientific research, is that meditation greatly contributes to a healthy, balanced mind and body. To ignore the evidence is ignoring the scientific basis of medicine.

As can be seen in the presentations on meditation at the recent world economic summit in Davos, Switzerland, and the cover story in the February 2nd issue of *Time* magazine, the benefits of meditation are coming to be widely accepted by health professionals, business leaders and the media.

It is now time for the medical profession to catch up and provide this information to those who depend on them for the most advanced advice for mind and body health.

Written by **Robert Schneider**, MD, FACC