

Meditation has been shown to be able to play a part in relieving a host of mind-made illnesses, from anxiety to heart disease. Dr Malcolm Carruthers

Therapeutic benefits

The health benefits of meditation are well-known and so wide-ranging it is beyond the scope of this book to itemize them or go into detail, but major benefits include:

● Boosting the immune system

Recent research has found that meditation can help us fight off illness by boosting the immune system. Volunteers who meditated for eight weeks proved to have higher levels of antibodies in their bloodstreams than those who did not, suggesting that the state of relaxed awareness associated with meditation helps the body to repair itself.

● Relief from stress and stress-related conditions

Meditation has been dubbed 'the relaxation response' because it counteracts the 'fight-flight' response, stemming the flow of hormones released into our bodies when we feel threatened or stressed. Stress is a vital survival mechanism, the body's natural physiological reaction to a challenging situation that enables us to make quick decisions and take effective action. It is only when pressure is unabated and we are continuously stressed out that it becomes damaging. Prolonged stress compromises the immune system and places a huge strain on the cardiovascular system. The list of illnesses in which it is implicated is long and doubtless familiar, and includes high blood pressure, heart disease, some forms of cancer and some infectious diseases, such as the common cold. Stress is also a major factor in migraine and insomnia, plays a role in drug and

alcohol abuse, and is associated with emotional and psychological problems such as anxiety, panic attacks and depression.

Meditation is a highly effective antidote to stress, literally switching off the flow of stress hormones and reversing the biochemical changes in our bodies that they trigger. By stopping stress from building up, meditation provides relief from the damaging effects of chronic stress and stress-related conditions, and restores the body's natural balance.

● Slowing down the ageing process

Nothing known to man can guarantee eternal youth or ageless ageing, but insofar as anything can be called the elixir of life, it has to be meditation. Not only does it relieve stress, one of the major factors in premature ageing, but in a test measuring blood pressure, hearing and eyesight, the average performance of short-term meditators was found to be equivalent to that of people five years younger, while longer-term meditators (five years or more) performed as though they were twelve years younger than their chronological age. On physical appearance meditation also scores highly. Dipping into the still waters of our innermost being imparts a radiance not even the most advanced face cream could improve on and as stress dissolves, frown lines smooth out and the complexion looks visibly refreshed and more youthful.

● Increasing creative abilities and improving performance

Related to meditation's anti-ageing effects are an overall



improvement in all aspects of mental performance: faster reaction times, clearer thinking, increased creativity, intelligence and productiveness, and a greater ability to focus. This has obvious implications both personally and professionally, leading to greater success in the workplace and a more fulfilling life.

● Emotional wellbeing

Meditators report increased self-awareness, self-confidence and self-esteem, feeling happier and more balanced emotionally. Relationships also improve as we become more aware and able to diffuse tensions before they reach flash-point.

As mentioned above, the goals you set for yourself in meditation affect your experience of it. The higher your goals, the more intense the process of purification as the inner spring-cleaning gets underway. Similarly, difficult relationships can intensify before they move on and improve. The fact that you meditate does not mean your fraught relationship with your wayward teenage daughter will be transformed overnight or that her behaviour will change. But it does encourage better communication and helps you to accept people for who and what they are as opposed to who and what you want them to be.

The rose represents the mystical centre, or heart, and stands for perfection and completion.