

The modern world is fast paced and there is ever evolving technology that places a high emphasis on human productivity and efficiency. This can result in individuals finding they have little time for making deep and meaningful connections with themselves or others. In turn, this may cultivate a relentless feeling of being overwhelmed and stressed. With so much to do and so little time, it is easy to get caught up in an endless cycle of constant multitasking. This can lead to an overall decline in wellbeing. However, even if the pace of life is speeding up, this does not mean that we must choose to be hurried. For many, the practice of meditation is the perfect antidote to these pressures. The positive influence meditation practice can have on an individual's health can be far reaching, with a range of recognised benefits to a person's physiological, psychological, and/or spiritual wellbeing. Using a variety of techniques, meditation can train the mind to focus attention, without force, on the present moment; whilst accepting, without judgement, thoughts relating to the past or present that may wander into the mind. Whilst not essential, regular practice is likely to have a greater impact on the recognised benefits.

As meditation provides an opportunity to focus only on the present, it encourages self-awareness, and a calming of the mind. For a person feeling stressed, anxious, or overwhelmed, there are numerous psychological benefits they may experience from meditating to manage the symptoms of stress in a safe and effective way. Often, when a person is stressed or anxious, being able to focus seems impossible, and left unaddressed, it can lead to catastrophic thinking, where scenarios escalate in disproportionate measures in our minds. Meditation can assist with preventing this, as once the mind is slowed, a new perspective can be gained during stressful situations or episodes, providing clarity, and so helping to reduce negative emotions. Once peace of mind is found, increased feelings of happiness can occur. A deeper connection with oneself may also lead to a deeper connection with others, which can develop humility as well as empathy and compassion; therefore, leading to a longer term, more positive change in perspective and a general overall sense of belonging and happiness. Clinical Psychologist Diana Adile Kirschner, notes that in a relationship, this has been seen to help with reducing bickering as individuals become less angry, more self-reflective, and more loving.

Psychological issues do not always stem from external influences, for example, hormonal changes can create mood swings, anxiety, and depression; in such cases, the benefits of meditation can result in alleviating such symptoms as PMT and menopause.

When our minds are full of anxious thoughts, our bodies can respond by increasing the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol – when this happens, both psychological and physical wellbeing can be negatively impacted. Extensive research shows that meditation can relieve such stress in a safe and effective manner, to the extent that the NHS now advocates meditation for stress, anxiety, and mental health issues.

Essentially, the psychological benefits of meditation can ultimately lead to individuals feeling happier as mood, creativity, resilience, productivity, and ability to learn etc improve and emotions are stabilised and worries naturally decrease.

Whilst anxiety and stress inevitably affect us in a psychological way, the repercussions can, and often do, have a direct influence on the physical form. Examples may include causing tension in the body; higher heart rate/panic attacks; increases in blood pressure; poor gut health; auto-immune diseases etc. However, the

physiological benefits of meditation can also be far reaching, with substantial evidence to prove that regular practice can enhance health and wellbeing and counteract such physiological factors by relaxing quicker and so relieving tension, lowering blood pressure, managing anxiety, consequently decreasing the heart rate, and managing gut health and so on.

Meditation can also aid better quality sleep, as the benefits are cumulative; meditation can help relaxation, alter brain waves, and impact melatonin levels. This means that the reported 20% of the population who have problems ranging from struggling to get to sleep, staying asleep or waking very early and not being able to get back to sleep could directly benefit.

Meditation has also been shown to impact the part of the brain that manages pain and in turn helping to change the way a person responds to it, and so resulting in efficient pain management and the potential for reducing pain medication in certain circumstances.

As stated, today's world seems to dictate a faster, intense lifestyle that is managed through technology and inhibits human interaction. As a result of such factors, people can become disconnected with themselves and others. In these circumstances, meditation can help build spiritual wellness – either in a secular or non-secular way, by raising awareness of the purpose and meaning of life, including morals and ethics. In turn, this can draw out a self-awareness, help connect to inner wisdom and intuition, build a sense of oneness, and encourage the feeling of being interconnected with others and the natural world. Through this, we can develop a deeper understanding and acceptance of ourselves and others, which aids our empathy, compassion and where applicable, forgiveness of others. Ultimately, meditation can connect a person to the inner peace that resides in us all. Dependant on the level of this connection, the awareness can extend to non-duality.

To conclude, practicing meditation has numerous benefits to health and wellbeing. It can assist in facilitating a sense of calm, self-awareness, and recognition of the present moment. By lowering stress levels, helping to understand pain, channelling a better focus, and building on a sense of empathy, compassion, and inner peace the results can be far reaching and long lasting in a number of ways, from alleviating everyday concerns to deep rooted issues that can affect the psychological, physiological and spiritual make up of an individual.