

Improve your health with silence

By Eve Lees

PSSSST...wanna get high? There's a way to feel euphoric that's free—and legal! Meditation is becoming popular in the mainstream within this era of spiritual awareness. It not only calms the mind, it can also slow aging, boost your immune system and control stress.

Meditating is simply clearing your mind of all thoughts. You are not sleeping. You are in a state of “thoughtless awareness.” Putting inner silence into your day can be done anywhere, anytime, and for as short or long a time as you like.

We rest our bodies between and during exercise sessions to allow muscles and other tissues to energize and repair. Quietening the mind does the same for our brains. When meditation is added to the deep sleep we have each night (which many of us aren't getting), our brains can recuperate and cells can continue to develop. This keeps us mentally fit. And it can keep us younger—with less stress affecting our mind and body, there's less cellular wear and tear.

Many of our thoughts are worry- or fear-based. Fear or chronic worrying is the worst toxin you can put into your body. It causes several chemical changes that do your body much harm, including weakening your immune system and increasing your risk for illness. Negative thoughts are just as health robbing and can also dominate our minds. Meditation gives the mind a break from this damage. It can also assist in teaching us to control those thoughts and the reactions to them. We can train our brain to be calm and become more able to think clearly when the pressure is on.

Try to regularly take time every day to quiet the mind and not be thinking of anything at all. Try beginning with two five-minute or ten-minute sessions. Keep at it and you'll soon master this seemingly impossible task of thinking of nothing. The calmness and intense peace you'll experience is the best kind of legal “high” you can have!

Here are some meditation basics: Close your eyes, relax and be aware only of the present—of your surroundings in the moment. Stop all mind-chatter about the past or future. Be completely absorbed in present time. Feel your heart beating. Notice your breathing pattern. Feel any sensations

you presently have inside you. Visualize a flow of energy moving through your body and pulsating within every cell. Don't think. Just feel. If you catch your mind straying to thoughts, gently coax it back to its silent awareness of the present.

You don't necessarily have to close your eyes to meditate for short periods. When you meditate, you are fully aware (not asleep), so you can conveniently squeeze it in throughout your day.

You can inconspicuously meditate in line-ups, waiting rooms, or even in your car while waiting at intersections. When doing daily tasks like washing hands, gardening, cooking, or at your computer, stop for a moment periodically and just feel what's happening inside your body. Outside, focus on the trees you pass, the people standing at the bus stop, the colourful flowers along the boulevard. See it all. Feel it all.

Have your morning tea or coffee as you look out the window or stroll through your yard. Really see your surroundings: the plants and trees. Don't think. Just feel the perfection of everything around you. You'll start your day with a calm, serene disposition. Instead of mindlessly watching television or reflecting on your day in the bathtub, use this time to meditate. If you exercise regularly, use your stretching component at the end of the workout to clear your mind of thoughts. Focus on feeling your body as you stretch.

If meditation becomes habit, reserve a special area for meditating. How about that easy chair in the corner? The bench in your yard? Or turn the spare room into a meditation room.

There's always time for health-boosting inner silence. For only a few moments daily, simply be still. Appreciate the wonder and perfection of you and the world around you. Watch. Listen. Feel. And stop thinking.



Eve Lees, a former newspaper editor, has been a health and fitness professional for over 20 years. She is a certified nutrition and wellness specialist, a certified personal trainer, a health speaker, and a health writer for several publications.