

# **Meditation – The Antidote for Stress**

## **Part 1: What are the Benefits of Restful Awareness or Meditation?**

There are two kinds of deep rest. The first is restful sleep in which both the body and the mind are at rest and we have very little awareness. The second is restful awareness, a state where the body is in deep rest, but the mind is still alert. The best way to achieve the state of restful awareness and its benefits is through the daily practice of Meditation. In our Western Culture we commonly think of meditation as a tool for stress management, however meditation has many benefits. Meditation releases stress, enhances creativity, and enlivens the natural healing and rejuvenating systems in our bodies.

**What is stress?** We experience stress anytime we encounter an obstacle to the fulfillment of our needs or desires. Stress triggers the most primitive part of our involuntary nervous system and our body responds with what is commonly known as the “fight or flight” response. The “fight or flight” response was first described by an early 20<sup>th</sup> century American scientist by the name of Walter Cannon. The original purpose of the fight-or-flight response was to help us survive in threatening situations, and occasionally it still serves that purpose if we happen to encounter a life threatening situation. However, more often than not when we have stress in our daily lives it triggers an “inappropriate” fight or flight response. When this happens and we do not have a way to release this stress then eventually stress will accumulate in our body and can lower our immunity and cause disease (dis –ease). Some of the results of experiencing prolonged or accumulated stress are accumulated toxins, elevated blood pressure, autoimmune diseases, heart disease, cancer, stomach ulcers, insomnia, anxiety and depression.

## **What are the physiological responses of the fight or flight response?**

- Increased heart rate and blood pressure
- Breathing becomes shallow and rapid
- Sweating
- Blood platelets become more sticky
- Increased production of hormones by the adrenal glands: adrenaline, cortisol and glucagon.
- Decrease in the production of HGH (growth hormone), insulin and sex hormones
- Your immune system is suppressed

**What is “restful awareness”** The state of “restful awareness or meditation produces physiological responses that are exactly the opposite of the fight or flight response. This is why meditation is often referred to as “the antidote to stress”. What are the physiological responses during meditation?

- Decreased heart rate
- Blood pressure becomes normal
- Breathing slows and becomes more efficient
- You perspire less
- Your adrenal glands produce less hormones adrenaline, glucagon, and cortisol (known as the “stress hormone”)
- Your pituitary gland produces more growth hormone (HGH is known as the “anti-aging hormone), and you produce more sex hormones
- Strengthened immune system

Practicing meditation will affect your health in the following ways. Meditation provides a way to release stress and eliminate toxins. When the mind settles down in a state of restful awareness, the body also settles and gets a deep level of rest. Rest is nature’s way of restoring and rejuvenating the body and enlivening the body’s own self-healing systems. Meditation is no longer just for ex-hippies, its benefits have been well established and accepted by the medical community. Meditation is for the mainstream world looking for tools to experience more health, well-being and balance in their lives.

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