

# Mindfulness Training Improves Sleep Quality; Lessens Need for Sleep Medicines

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Stressed-out people sleep better and take sleep medication less often when they learn to let go of intrusive thoughts, according to researchers at Duke Integrative Medicine.

Their data shows participants who took an eight-week mindfulness-based stress reduction course reported less trouble sleeping through the night, and also less sleepiness during the day. This is the first study to document several positive effects of mindfulness training on [sleep quality](#) in a group of generally healthy, but stressed, individuals.

"When we don't know what to do with intrusive and persistent thoughts, the mind and body feel threatened, says Jeff Greeson, PhD, MS, a clinical health psychologist at Duke who presented his preliminary results at the North American Research Conference on Complementary and Integrative Medicine.

"That signals the 'fight or flight' response which starts a cascade of sleep-robbing emotions like agitation and anxiety."

Greeson's study followed 151 adults, three-quarters of whom were women, who underwent eight weeks of MBSR training. He validated improvements in sleep quality using a nationally recognized sleep quality scale -- The Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI).

Statistically significant improvements were noted in overall sleep quality (26 percent), [sleep disturbances](#), i.e., waking up at night and feeling

uncomfortable (16 percent), frequency of using prescription or over-the-counter sleep medications (25 percent), and improvements in experiencing sleepiness during the day (28 percent).

"Before beginning the MSBR program, 70 percent of the study participants met the clinical cutoff for poor sleep quality" Greeson said. "After MBSR, 50 percent of participants reported clinically significant sleep disturbances. That's a 20 percent improvement rate."

"When people become more mindful," he explained, "they learn to look at life through a new lens. They learn how to accept the presence of thoughts and [feelings](#) that may keep them up at night. They begin to understand that they don't have to react to them. As a result, they experience greater emotional balance and less sleep disturbances."

The findings are particularly relevant as they come at a time when stress in the general population is at an all time high. More people are worrying about the economy, jobs, their financial situation and the strain of coping with it all in their daily lives.

"All that worrying, obsessing, and ruminating can increase risk of illness and disease," says Greeson. "When the mind worries, the body responds." The key, he says, is not to push those [thoughts](#) away, but to acknowledge them. "That helps people manage their reaction to stress and anxiety and help them remain calm."

Greeson's research is part of a larger study on mindfulness funded by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. His work will continue to research the effects of the MBSR program first developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts 30 years ago. That program is now taught by trained professionals throughout the country.

Provided by Duke University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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