

Meditation back to basics

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The research found 'silent' meditation is effective in reducing work stress.

(Medical Xpress) -- Fulltime workers who used a traditional 'silent' form of meditation became much less stressed and depressed compared to more conventional approaches to relaxation or even placebo, according to a paper published today in the online journal [Evidence Based Complementary Medicine](#), a leading publication in its field.

A team of researchers, led by Dr. Ramesh Manocha of the [Meditation Research Program](#) in Sydney Medical School, monitored stress levels of fulltime Australian workers in Sydney's CBD to determine the effectiveness of meditation in combating this widespread and expensive problem.

The eight-week clinical trial provides strong evidence that there are

measurable, practical and clinically relevant effects of meditation, and particularly those that are aimed at achieving the experience of mental silence, states Dr Manocha.

The study looked at a specific definition of meditation based on the authentic understanding of meditation as the experience of 'mental silence'. Dr. Manocha says his team chose to use the ancient eastern understanding of meditation, rather than trendy modern methods that have become popular amongst modern [consumers](#), because the modern methods performed poorly when subjected to rigorous [scientific evaluation](#).

"What we wanted to know was whether this style of meditation was more effective in reducing occupational stress than placebo, and if it is, do different approaches to meditation have different effects?" says Dr. Manocha.

"What we found was mental silence orientated meditation is a safe, highly effective strategy for dealing with work-related stress and depressive [feelings](#). And it is something you can teach yourself.

"We divided our volunteers into three groups, and those who used mental silence meditation showed significant reduction in their [stress levels](#) compared to those who used other methods such as [relaxation](#) or [visualisation](#), which often only generate a [placebo effect](#) at best.

"It's one of only a few meditation studies that clearly demonstrates an effect that is much greater than just placebo, and the implications of this study are wide ranging and worthy of further in depth investigation."

According to Manocha's study work stress is described by many experts as a modern epidemic. It costs the Australian economy \$15 billion per year. It is a leading cause of absenteeism, causing both mental health

problems such as anxiety and physical problems such as heart disease. Meditation can now be put forward as a simple, low cost intervention that can help prevent this.

The strategies currently available to tackle work stress often have limited effectiveness says Dr. Manocha. "This is where this study is remarkably relevant. It shows that a simple, mental silence orientated meditation skill, reduces stress significantly more than other often more expensive approaches to stress management.

"Another remarkable aspect of the study was the impact on depressive mood. Depression is a major problem in our society, so any low cost intervention that reduces the risk of depression is of great public health significance.

"This study, along with the evidence from other research that we have done, indicates that strategies like meditation should be used to prevent some of the major mental health problems that are facing our community."

A substantial proportion of depression in the community starts as works stress, says recent Australian research. "Given the shortage of other options to prevent the [mental health](#) epidemic that threatens the younger generation, I think we should seriously examine the potential of this unique finding to stem the tide," says Dr. Manocha.

"Stress is not just limited to the workplace. In Australia, 40 percent of the population experience significant stress, the majority seek help from GPs who are often at a loss to know what to recommend that is safe, effective and scientifically evaluated. Our study clearly says that this is something that health professionals can confidently recommend to both prevent and reduce [stress](#)."

Provided by University of Sydney

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