

Meditation linked to better wellbeing and health, including mental health

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(Medical Xpress) -- The experience of 'mental silence' is linked with better health outcomes and greater wellbeing according to a University of Sydney study.

The area of greatest difference was in mental health, where long-term meditators, with a minimum of two years of regular practice, were more than 10 percent better off than the general population.

"We found that the health and wellbeing profile of people who had meditated for at least two years was significantly higher in the majority of health and wellbeing categories when compared to the Australian population," said Dr Ramesh Manocha, Senior Lecturer in the Discipline of Psychiatry, Sydney Medical School, who led the research.

He worked with Professor Deborah Black and Dr Leigh Wilson from the Faculty of Health Sciences.

"Most markedly there was a robust relationship between the frequency of experiencing mental silence and better mental health. This definition is based on it being the form of meditation practised for centuries."

The national study is a world-first health quality-of-life survey of long-term meditators. It used the same measurement instruments as the one used by the federal government's National Health and Wellbeing Survey.

More than 350 people from across Australia who have meditated for at

least two years were assessed for the national study which has been published in the journal of [Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine](#).

"We focused on the definition of meditation as mental silence and surveyed practitioners of Sahaja Yoga meditation who practise a form of meditation aimed at achieving this state rather than relaxation or [mindfulness](#) methods that are usually the focus of other forms," Dr Manocha said.

The meditators were asked how often they experienced 'mental silence' for more than a few minutes at any one time.

Fifty-two percent of respondents said that they experienced mental silence "several times per day or more" while 32 percent were experiencing it "once or twice per day".

"Our analysis showed very little relationship at all between how often the person who meditated physically sat down to meditate and mental health scores. However the relationship was clearly apparent in relation to how often they experienced the state of mental silence.

"The health advantage appears to be connected to this aspect more than any other feature of the meditation lifestyle. In other words it is quality over quantity.

"While we did expect that there would be some differences between the meditators and the general population we didn't expect the findings to be so pronounced. We repeated large components of the survey several times to confirm our results and got the same outcomes."

The Australian government survey give a numerical score to each facet of mental and physical health and because it has been applied as a

national measure for the past 10 years in studies around the world involving millions of people. It allowed the researchers to accurately compare the health profile of the meditators surveyed with the general Australian population.

The meditators were primarily non-smokers and non-drinkers, so to adjust for that potential bias the researchers also compared the meditators to those parts of the Australian population who did not drink or smoke, and achieved the same results.

"This is one of the first studies to assess the long term health impacts of meditation on health and wellbeing. When we take the evidence of this study, along with the results of our other clinical trials, it makes a strong case for the use of [meditation](#) as a primary prevention strategy, especially in [mental health](#)," Dr Manocha said.

Provided by University of Sydney

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