

Simple meditation shown to decrease symptoms of stress and depression

October 7 2012, by Julie Deardorff

A simple form of mindful meditation can help breast cancer survivors stave off the symptoms of depression, new research suggests. But the potential benefits don't stop there.

Meditation may help wipe out some of those repetitive thoughts about the past or future that can clutter the mind once treatment ends. It may also reduce loneliness and decrease the body's [inflammatory response](#) to stress - which can trigger serious illness - according to a small study published in the journal Brain, Behavior, and Immunity.

"[Mindfulness meditation](#) is particularly effective in buffering the [effects of stress](#) on well-being and [physical health](#)," said study co-author J. David Creswell, director of the Health and Human Performance Laboratory at Carnegie Mellon University. Though the mechanism isn't known, meditation can help stop the spiral of [negative thoughts](#) that can trigger distress, Creswell said.

Meditation teacher Elesa Commerce knows the benefits firsthand. She practiced meditation before, during and after her own treatment for [breast cancer](#). She also meditated to help her cope with her mother's and grandmother's breast cancer journeys. Her DVD, "Finding Your Way," is a nine-hour program that includes meditation and is designed to help breast cancer survivors navigate their changed world. Find it at foreverwhole.org.

Below, Commerce elaborates on how meditation can help [breast cancer](#)

survivors:

Q: How can meditation help once [cancer treatment](#) has ended?

A: Meditation helps you stay present, and it helps you work with your mind in productive ways. It's important to stay present when dealing with such devastating news because it is then that the mind gets very creative and usually in unhelpful ways - about the future or possible lack of a future.

Q: How do I meditate, or quiet my mind?

A: There are many ways or techniques. First, you quiet the body and sit comfortably. You then observe the weather of your mind by noting the intensity and velocity of your thoughts. You welcome any and all thoughts. You become like a healthy form of Teflon - imagine that - holding your seat but not allowing any of the thoughts or feelings to stick to you. You notice a thought - greet it, welcome it, say "hello" to it and let it go like a helium balloon that floats away without you even noticing where it goes. And you do this hundreds, thousands of times, without judgment, without reaction, without counting. You keep coming back to the sensation of the breath that you are breathing just now - to the present moment.

Q: Is meditation more difficult to learn when you're battling a life-threatening illness?

A: I think it's easier because you know why you need to learn how to do this. There is an amazing clarity that often comes with a cancer diagnosis and treatment. One of the things [meditation](#) teaches you is that cancer isn't all there is. You are no more a cancer diagnosis than you are the color red. Life is a mosaic, and there is always a lot going on in a person's life. What matters and what determines the quality of our life

depends on what we choose to focus on. Whatever the mind focuses on magnifies.

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