

Meditation might be useful addition to heart-healthy lifestyle and medical treatment

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Meditation has the potential to reduce some risk factors for heart disease, but the gold standard for lowering risk remains a heart-healthy lifestyle and following medical recommendations, according to a new

scientific statement from the American Heart Association.

Studies have shown that meditation can have long-term effects on the brain and how it works, and numerous studies on the potential benefits of meditation have been published, which prompted the American Heart Association to review current high-quality scientific studies to determine whether the practice has a role in reducing [heart disease](#).

Although the practice of meditation dates back as far as 5000 BC and is associated with certain philosophies and religions, meditation is increasingly practiced as a secular and therapeutic activity. About 8 percent of Americans practice some sort of meditation and, in the National Health Interview Survey, conducted by the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, which is part of the National Institutes of Health, 17 percent of patients with cardiovascular disease expressed an interest in participating in a clinical trial of meditation.

A writing group composed of cardiovascular disease experts and a neuroscientist reviewed existing research on whether common types of sitting meditation had an impact on [cardiovascular risk factors](#) and disease.

The review excluded studies on combination mind-body practices, such as yoga and Tai Chi, since the [physical activity](#) included in these practices has an established positive impact on [heart disease risk](#). The studies of sitting meditation, including a variety of common forms such as: Samatha; Vipassana (Insight Meditation); Mindful Meditation; Zen Meditation (Zazen); Raja Yoga; Loving-Kindness (Metta); Transcendental Meditation; and Relaxation Response showed that meditation:

- May be associated with decreased levels of stress, anxiety and depression, and improved quality of sleep and overall well-being;

- May help lower blood pressure, although there is not enough evidence to determine whether or how much it may lower blood pressure in a given individual;
- May help individuals stop smoking; and
- Might be associated with a decreased risk of heart attack, although there are only a few studies on this, and more studies are needed before any conclusions can be made.

"Although studies of meditation suggest a possible benefit on cardiovascular risk, there hasn't been enough research to conclude it has a definite role," said Glenn N. Levine, M.D., chair of the writing group of the AHA Scientific Statement that is published in the *Journal of the American Heart Association*, the Open Access Journal of the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association.

"Since education on how to meditate is widely available and meditation has little if any risk associated with it, interested people may want to use these techniques, in addition to established medical and lifestyle interventions, as a possible way to lower heart disease risk. However, it's important that people understand that the benefits remain to be better established and that [meditation](#) is not a substitute for traditional medical care," said Levine, who is professor of medicine at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas.

Levine notes that until we know more, the mainstay for the prevention and treatment of [heart disease](#) remains lifestyle advice and medical treatment that has been carefully studied and shown to work, including cholesterol therapy, [blood pressure](#) control, smoking cessation and regular physical activity.

More information: *Journal of the American Heart Association* (2017). [DOI: 10.1161/JAHA.117.002218](https://doi.org/10.1161/JAHA.117.002218)

Provided by American Heart Association

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